The Distance between Two Worlds: What Happened to *The Vagina Monologues* When It Crossed The Pacific Ocean?

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary world, the issue of cultural exchange between countries is receiving more and more attention. However, since every cultural product reflects the socio-cultural context of where it was originally created, exchanging cultural products is never simple. This research analyzes the issue of cultural exchanges between countries in the era of globalization, based on the case of The Vagina Monologues. In this thesis, I will attempt to examine and discuss various forms of and possibilities for intercultural exchange between countries by comparing and contrasting the Korean and the USA productions of The Vagina Monologues.
DEDICATION

To My Mom and Dad
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Gloria Steinem says of herself that she belongs to the “down there” generation.\(^1\) This means that in her time, she always had to be careful, private and even secretive in talking about vaginas. I am much younger than Gloria Steinem, but sometimes I am still thinking about exactly the same issues that she already thought: speaking out about vaginas.

In some respect, I have to admit that it seems obvious that to talk about the vaginas in public has become much easier than before. Especially, in the academic areas such as medical research, women studies, sociology, or anthropology. However, I still have questions about this. Can we really be sure that we are not part of the “down there” generation anymore?

The woman who approached this question successfully was Eve Ensler, an American playwright and performer. She discovered that saying the word ‘vagina’ is scary, and she felt guilty and wrong whenever she said the word ‘vagina.’ Most of all, she found that the feeling of awkwardness and discomfort, which are always present whenever she says the word ‘vagina’ was not only her problem.\(^2\)

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Her awareness of this matter propelled her into action. Thus, she decided to talk about it. She started meeting numerous women who might have felt the same way about this matter. She interviewed them about their personal stories, about themselves, and about their vaginas. Through the interviews with more than two hundred women, she collected a variety of stories about vaginas. Based on these real stories, she finally created the piece called *The Vagina Monologues*.³

Some people did not even try to hide their hostility towards this piece when it was first performed. To them, this piece was just an explicit, inappropriate, and indecent creation. However, other people highly welcomed it. To them, the play was a brave attempt to resist the deep-rooted patriarchal convention. Soon, it became very popular not only as a cutting-edge theatre production, but also as a social movement. As of today, Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* was translated into 45 different languages and performed in over 119 countries.⁴

However, there arises the following question. Can we necessarily say that Eve Ensler’s original intention in creating this work was also shared when her script was adapted for stage? By simply translating one language into another, can we have the socio-cultural context of cultural creations to be shared, as well as their dramatic narratives? Living in the age of globalization, being exposed to multinational cultural products every day, what are we supposed to expect in cultural translation? This thesis explores these questions in the following pages.

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"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."\(^5\) It was 1892 when Rudyard Kipling wrote this verse in his poem, *The Ballad of East and West*. As he metaphorically depicted in his poem, the East and the West seemed too far away from each other to communicate. Since each cultural area was based on its own traditions, history, and belief systems, which are totally different from each other, it might have looked impossible, then, for them to correspond with each other.

However, the world has changed greatly since the time when the physical and emotional distance between the East and the West looked too huge to be traversed. Especially after an important transition from an industrial age to a post-industrial age, which Alvin Toffler has called the “Third Wave,”\(^6\) every single element of society has begun to be reshaped. Both in matters of politics and economy, and in culture and lifestyles, everything has changed as compared to the past.

Among numerous transformations in the last twenty years, one of the most remarkable is the growing closeness and strength of solidarity between countries. The importance of relationships between countries has become more significant than ever,

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and the economic situation of one country affects other countries’ economic conditions more considerably than ever. As Richard Schechner also describes, “Globalization mixes up all systems, such as information, economic, military, ideological, social, political, and cultural systems.”

Thanks to the accelerated tendency of globalization and highly developed communication technology, it seems that most people easily accept the fact that we are living in “a” world. Now, it does not take three months for someone in the East to receive a postcard sent from the West, and nobody in the East thinks that he or she is safe from H1N1 Influenza, a new virus in the West. We do not need to visit Switzerland to buy a Swiss watch, and we can travel all around the world without leaving our own room thanks to the Internet. Youtube, for instance, is allowing Korean youths to be fans of American Idol, and in the same way, it lets American youths be Japanese manga maniacs. Indeed, the East and the West are meeting each other every day, including this moment.

Rapidly ongoing globalization has caused numerous innovations in the area of culture, especially. Cultural adaptations, as well as cultural exchanges between countries, have become more active than ever. Having an opportunity to experience hybrid cultures has become an ordinary part of our modern lives. In the entertainment business market, it seems that national borders do not have as much significance as they had before. For instance, it is not unusual to find a Korean singer’s music video, which is produced by an American producer, choreographed by a Russian choreographer, performed by actors from Hong Kong, and broadcast by Korean TV stations as a Korean cultural product.

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Needless to say, active cultural exchanges and adaptation are also easily observed in the theatre scene. In the contemporary world, to find a domestic theatre production imported from other countries is no longer difficult, and to discover attempts to integrate several factors from different cultures in one production is not challenging either. For example, the Korean theatre company Yeohang ja presented Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* based on the method of Korean traditional movements, and the Taiwanese theatre company Contemporary Legend Theatre presented Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting For Godot* using the method of traditional Chinese singing called Beijing Opera.

Thus, there are numerous attempts to combine various elements from different cultures into the shape of another cultural product called inter-cultural performances, and this tendency is usually pointed out as a unique feature of recent cultural scenes, which was not observed in the past. However, the problem is that trading cultural products is not as simple or easy as trading industrial products. There are two significant reasons which make trading cultural products more complicated and difficult than trading industrial products: the language issue, and the fact that every cultural product necessarily reflects the socio-cultural context in which it was initially created.

The significance of language in theatre is irrefutable. Even though it is true that there are numerous theatrical works which do not involve any verbalization, such as pantomime, dance-theatre, and non-verbal performances, it is equally true that in many cases language is still the crucial tool, which delivers a performance’s theme, idea, and

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narrative to its audiences. However, all performances have to be translated from one language into another when they are exported or imported. This means that every theatrical work being traded cannot avoid having some alterations in its very crucial linguistic elements.

The point, which makes this matter more complicated is the fact that the function of language in theatre is never limited to conveying the message. Regarding the principality of language in theatre, Laurence Senelick claimed that “The essence of a dramatic text lies in its language. Each language creates a particular affective relationship with what its sounds evoke.”

For example, it is impossible to expect that we will still be able to appreciate the unique and peculiar impressions from Shakespeare’s text, once it is translated into another language.

In addition to this, there is another point which should be discussed when we debate the relationship between languages and theatres. It is the fact that language is not just the sum of alphabetical letters but a cultural heritage, which essentially reflects the society’s culture, history, tradition, and conventional belief system. For example, there are more than hundred different words that indicate snow in Inuit. It is hard to say with confidence that it will be possible to translate all those Inuit words for snow differently into another language other than Inuit appropriately, correctly, and clearly without losing each word’s characteristic nuance. When we recall the fact that no such nuance can be ignored in any scene of a play, we can easily see that this is an extremely serious matter in translating. In this manner, language always functions as one of the biggest challenges that we encounter when attempting translation.

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Another difficulty that we have to face when we try to exchange cultural products among countries, which we do not necessarily need to confront when trading industrial products, is the fact that every cultural product – including theatre – is a social construct. This implies that theatres, just like all other forms of cultural products, always reflect the socio-cultural context of the place where they are first created. Since this argument can be directly linked to the discussion about the audiences’ reception of performances, it is crucial to be cognizant about this feature of theatre. Regarding this, attention to Aristotle’s argument about rhetoric and how it is interpreted in contemporary communication studies is quite helpful.

Aristotle identifies three different forms of Rhetoric: “Ethos, Pathos, and Logos.” He explains that these three different forms are three different ways to develop one’s speaking or writing to be more persuasive and appealing. However, communication studies offer us another possible way to understand Aristotle’s argument. In the area of communication studies, “Ethos, Pathos, and Logos” tend to be understood as three elements which construct a single communication activity rather than as three different types of speaking or writing. In this understanding, “Ethos, Pathos, and Logos” are usually interpreted as Speaker, Receiver, and Message, respectively. From the communication studies’ point of view, since these three elements are indispensable for the communication act, communication is not possible if there is a missing element among these three elements of communication, especially in an interpersonal communication act.

As Merriam-Webster dictionary defines, translation is usually regarded as "An act, process, or instance of translating as a rendering from one language into another." According to this definition, it appears that translation is an activity, which is related to the Logos part in the communication act. However, when we recall the fact that if the language translation is not accompanied by an appropriate instruction about the socio-cultural background of the material which is being translated, there is no way to keep the original meaning or intention, it becomes clear that translation is an activity not only related to the Logos part, but also to the Pathos part at the same time. This duality is one of the most important reasons why cultural translation is more complicated and difficult when compared to the industrial exchange.

As observed above, importing and exporting cultural products is not simple at all, even though it is happening more frequently than ever. Moreover, some practical demands make this matter even more complicated. For example, various trade agreements on cultural products among countries, different deliberation processes of local governments, and dissimilar presentation systems from one country to another are also factors, which make the exchange of cultural products more sophisticated than trading industrial products. However, even though we cannot avoid facing all these difficulties whenever cultural exchanges happen, the fact that the tendency to interchange cultures among countries is becoming more and more active is very hard to rebuff. This is why the matter of cultural exchanges among countries needs to be discussed seriously and in depth, now more than ever.

In arguing the matter of cultural exchanges among countries in contemporary world, the case of Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* can be a suitable starting point for several reasons. To show why Ensler’s work can be an appropriate case study for this research topic, and to evaluate what we can learn from the case study of this theatrical piece, analyzing a brief history of Eve Ensler and *The Vagina Monologues* will be extremely helpful.

Eve Ensler is an American playwright who is well known for her several theatrical works dealing with social issues related to women. Since she always tried hard to highlight these issues through her theatrical work, she has a great reputation not only as a playwright but also as a feminist activist. One of the significant events which prompted the development of this identity is linked to her childhood experiences.

Ensler was born in 1953 in Scottsdale, Arizona to a wealthy family. Her father was a high-ranking executive of a food company and her mother was a housewife. However, even though she was born in a wealthy family, she had a miserable childhood. This was because her father constantly sexually abused her while her mother did not notice what was happening to her little daughter. Fortunately, her father’s sexual abuse ended when Ensler became a teenager, but her father continuously mistreated her using violence. At that time, her mother became aware of the abuse, but she could not stop her husband, because she was afraid of him. Even though Ensler’s relationship with her mother has recovered after her father’s death in 1989, what she experienced in her childhood at the hands of her father caused her serious trauma.13

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After she finished high school, she studied at Middlebury College in Vermont. She states that she behaved like a crazy person in her college years. As her graduation thesis, she wrote about suicide in contemporary poetry; she explains that this was her intentional choice to protect herself from suicide. In this manner, she spent many a gloomy day until she turned 24 years old. When she turned 24, she finally succeeded in breaking her dark cycle. It is not known how she escaped from her melancholy, except the fact that she started to write plays again from this moment. She married Richard McDermott, a theatre director in 1978, but divorced him after 10 years of marriage. While married, she adopted Richard’s son, Dylan McDermott. Even though Eve Ensler and Richard McDermott’s marriage is over, Dylan McDermott and Eve Ensler still have a good relationship not only as son and mother, but also as supportive companions to each other.\footnote{Ryu, Sookryeol. Translator’s Note. The Vagina Monologues. By Eve Ensler. Trans. Sookryeol Ryu. Seoul: Book House Publishing Co., Ltd., 2001: 156-8.}

The very first event which inspired Eve Ensler to create The Vagina Monologues happened in her college years. It was a short conversation with her friend about menopause. She confesses that she was very shocked at that moment, because she found that her friend despised, abhorred, and loathed talking about her vagina. This experience led her to create her most representative work, The Vagina Monologues. Ensler explains her reasons for writing this piece by stating that she was worried about what women think about vaginas and even more worried that they do not think about them. She says, “I say it because I believe that what we don’t say we don’t see, acknowledge, or remember. What we don’t say becomes a secret, and secrets often create shame and fear and myths. I
say it because I want to someday feel comfortable saying it, and not ashamed and guilty.”

Based on her philosophy about speaking out the word ‘vagina,’ she started to collect numerous stories about vaginas through the interviews with more than two hundred women. Eve Ensler interviewed various women, regardless of their ages, ethnicities, social class, and nationalities. In this way, Ensler collected a great number of stories about vaginas. Among the collected stories, she chose some and reworked others. After this long journey, her project eventually turned into a solo performance piece. This is how *The Vagina Monologues* was created.

*The Vagina Monologues* was first performed in the basement of the Cornelia Street Café in Greenwich Village in New York City in 1996. There were a few critical voices which made an issue of using the word ‘vagina’ in public, but it seemed that many people were fascinated with its magical power, the power of speaking out about previously unmentionable body parts, when it was first performed.

It proceeded to arouse many people’s sympathy, and soon it became a very popular play. It started as a solo performance by Eve Ensler, but, soon many Hollywood celebrities such as Jane Fonda, Whoopi Goldberg, Idina Menzel, Glenn Close, Susan Sarandon, Marin Mazzie, and Oprah Winfrey participated in this piece as volunteer performers without any payment. This fact also contributed to this piece’s popularity.

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Based on its popularity, this play continued to be performed not only in the USA but also outside of the USA, including performances in Canada, Israel, Germany, England, and Singapore.\textsuperscript{17} \textit{The Vagina Monologues} brought Eve Ensler the Obie Award for ‘Best New Play’ in 1997, the Guggenheim Fellowship Award in Playwriting in 1999, and the Berrilla-Kerr Award for Playwriting in 2000.\textsuperscript{18} During this period, many people consistently continued to be interested in this work. Having many people’s support behind the scenes, in the two years since \textit{The Vagina Monologues} was performed for the first time, Eve Ensler founded an organization called V-Day to stop violence against women and girls, with many supporters. A fund for this organization was collected from ticket sales for \textit{The Vagina Monologues}.\textsuperscript{19}

As Ensler’s actions with \textit{The Vagina Monologues} and V-Day have grown bigger and bigger, some have attempted to interpret this piece as a social movement. Not only scholars from theatre studies, but also those from the fields of gender studies and sociology have started to deal with this piece in depth through their research. There also appeared several attempts to translate this piece into different languages, and as a result, amazingly, it was translated into over 45 languages and performed in more than 119 countries so far.\textsuperscript{20} However, given this case, can we necessarily say that Eve Ensler’s


‘worries about vaginas’ have also been shared just like her script was shared? Can we easily say that her original intention in creating this piece continued when it was translated into numerous languages? What on earth happened when *The Vagina Monologues* crossed the Pacific Ocean?

It was 2004 when I saw a Korean production (in Korea) of *The Vagina Monologues* for the first time.\(^{21}\) It was directed by Jinah Choi, and performed by professional actor Juhee Seo, who had already performed in this piece at least four times between 2001 and 2004. The location for the performance was a midsize proscenium stage of Woorim Chungdam Theatre in Chungdam-dong, Seoul. The house was sold out, and the audience waited with bated breath for the performance to begin. In the center of the stage, there was a small table and a chair for one person. On the deep stage, there was a big frame behind the chair. On the left corner of the stage, a piano was placed, ready to be played. After a short period of darkness, in a tense atmosphere, the performance finally began.

As the music started, Juhee Seo made her very first entrance to the stage. After a short introduction of the piece, she started to perform various stories about vaginas in a variety of ways. She sometimes delivered a story as if she were a 5-year old girl, and sometimes as if she were a 70-year old woman. She sometimes presented the story as if it were her own story, and sometimes shared the story as if it were a story that she had heard. Sometimes seated on the chair, sometimes standing, she delivered numerous

stories about vaginas with a lightness of touch. Indeed, it seemed as if her use of the word ‘vagina’ was an everyday occurrence.

Between the monologues, a short live piano piece was played, which fit into the play very efficiently and elegantly. Live piano pieces also worked as moments for audience to applaud the performer. It seemed that short moments of relief offered by piano playing between the monologues really worked well as occasions to build a closer connection between the performer and the audience.

Throughout the performance, she offered her audience a wonderful experience by talking about vaginas in public. As a member of that audience, I also had a great time during the performance. Her performance was truly amazing, and the aesthetical quality of the performance was extremely high, overall. Together with this, I could feel an emotional connection between other women spectators while we were talking about ‘our’ vaginas in a public space. I was greatly satisfied with the production.

However, even though it was true that I had a really good time while the piece was being performed, it was equally true that I felt a sort of discomfort at the same time while I was observing the performance. First, I could not tell where my indisposition came from, but, soon, I noticed why I felt troubled: I was uncomfortable because of the program. I was uncomfortable because of the poster. I was uncomfortable because of the way they advertised this piece. And, most of all, I was uncomfortable because of the title. I was angry when I found several advertisements which have a Hollywood style beauty in them right next to the notes from the director, which were very moving because of their boldness and outspokenness.

I felt sorry because I had to see several photos of stereotyped beauties in the advertisements, which skillfully use women as an efficient tool of commercialization right next to the photos of performance, which were well produced and excellently designed with the intention of breaking down the patriarchal point of view on women’s bodies. However, what displeased me the most was the title of the production. This was because the Korean production team presented this piece under its English title only, with the inscription of how the English words ‘vagina’ and ‘monologues’ are pronounced.

I was very confused with the fact that the word vagina was not translated into Korean for the title of the Korean production, because the most important theme of The Vagina Monologues is speaking out about what we could not speak about previously. This means that while the performer of this theatrical work said ‘boji’ – the word for vagina in Korean – more than a hundred times during the performance, the production itself did not say that word even once by omitting it from the title.

I started to wonder: Why did the Korean production team decide to present this piece under its English title? Was there any specific reason or circumstance which prevented them from translating the title of this production in Korean into something like “The Stories of Boji”? Can we say that not only the narrative of this piece but also its intention were successfully translated, even though the Korean production of this piece was presented under the English title without using that word which is supposed to be used in its title? All of these questions led me to think about what cultural translation would be like in the age of globalization.
In addition to my personal experience with the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues*, I found three significant reasons why *The Vagina Monologues* can be a very suitable case study for this research in dealing with the matter of cultural exchange and globalization. First of all, this piece deals with issues of gender and sexuality, which are some of the most important issues of current society. The fact that this theatrical work deals with a current social issue directly can be the first reason why the case of *The Vagina Monologues* can be a good case study for this research.

Second, this piece is being accepted not only as a theatrical artwork, but also as a social movement. As many people noticed its powerful effect, there appeared several attempts to understand and interpret this piece not only as a theatrical artwork but also as a social movement, especially in relation to feminist theories. This is not only because this play deals with a feminist issue as its theme, but also because it has expanded its boundary beyond the stage through several activities with the V-Day events. In this manner, this play is usually accepted as a social movement as well as a theatrical piece, and because of that, this play has a unique social status. This status allows us to understand more easily how the social contexts of certain plays are delivered and translated when a cultural translation takes place.

Third, this piece has already been translated into more than 45 different languages so far. This means that *The Vagina Monologues* can offer us numerous sources which can be possibly studied for this research using the history of its translation. To put this in another way, when it comes to the issue of translation from one language into another and the issue of these translations’ effect, we can easily access numerous sources.
derived from its original production. This is another reason why this piece can be an appropriate case study for this research.

Based on these three reasons, I will mainly refer to the case of Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* for the discussion examining what usually happens when cultural products are exchanged between countries. In doing this, I will employ two different methods in order to understand the Korean and the USA production of *The Vagina Monologues*. They are a comparative strategy which examines the similarities and differences between two productions and their different contexts and oral histories of those who are related to the productions – for example, the producers, the directors, and the performers. In addition to this, something of a theoretical analysis referring to theatre translation theories and some feminist theories will also be used.

The first research method, which will be employed in this thesis is comparing and contrasting two productions and their different contexts. The productions I will use are Eve Ensler’s original work, which can be seen in the HBO original documentary of the play (2002), and Juhee Seo’s performance of *The Vagina Monologues* (2004) performed in Korean, based on the translation of Sookryeol Ryu. This method includes drawing an in-depth parallel between numerous Korean newspaper articles and the USA newspaper articles which dealt with the productions, as well as Korean and USA magazines and journals. In this process, the materials which will be compared to each other are not limited to the play’s narrative only, but include analysis of the way each of them dealt with this production, especially their tones, points of view, and specific descriptions. For this process, I have collected more than 70 Korean reviews and articles
about this production and a similar amount from the USA production. Among the collected resources, all of the materials written or spoken in Korean were translated by me.

The second method is the analysis of oral histories from a number of people who contributed to staging this production in Korea. For example, this includes the translator of this work, Sookryeol Ryu, the first director of this work in Korea, Jina Lee’s assistant director, Roopina Oh, and the director of the restaged production, Jinah Choi.

All of the interviews were obtained in Seoul in Korean, and translated by me. The entire list of questions and answers shared through the interviews is attached as an appendix at the end of this thesis. In order to use the information collected from the several in-depth interviews with Korean production teams, I applied for the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Committee, and they approved this research after the investigation process in July 2008. Through these interviews, I discovered several stories about the production, which were not easily accessible to the general public. In particular, the stories of the directors and the performers of this work will be specifically compared to Eve Ensler’s stories, particularly in relation to her purpose, intention, and attitude in creating and staging this work.

A minor theoretical analysis will be included. In particular, theoretical frameworks used in my discussion include theories related to theatre translation, theories related to sociological discussions about globalization, and feminist theories. In reference to theories of translation, I will refer specifically to a forum entitled “What’s At Stake in Theatrical Translation?” published in Theatre Journal (2007). This is an academic
discussion about the difficulties of translation by a number of major scholars. According to Douglas Langworthy, one of the participants of this forum, appropriate theatrical translation allows for cultures to influence one another by breaking down cultural barriers. I will refer to his work and try to find an answer to the question whether or not The Vagina Monologues in Korean was appropriate.

This thesis is constructed with four chapters including the introduction and the conclusion. In this chapter, the introduction, I started my argument by pointing out the difficulties inherent in cultural exchanges beyond the national borders, as compared to exchanges of industrial products. Likewise, I discussed the significance of cultural exchanges among countries in the contemporary world being affected by a rapidly increasing globalization. In addition to this, by presenting a brief background of Eve Ensler and The Vagina Monologues, I introduced Eve Ensler’s The Vagina Monologues as a case study for this research topic.

In chapter two, the history of The Vagina Monologues in Korea will be introduced in detail. This will cover the period from the time this piece was first imported to Korea from the USA to the latest production of this piece, which opened in 2008. Throughout this chapter, several questions about the Korean production of this piece will be answered: for example, what the production team members’ intention and focus were in staging this piece, how the audience reacted to this piece, and most important of all, what kind of transformation occurred from the first production to the last production.

In chapter three, the differences between Korean productions and the US productions will be discussed from three standpoints: the matter of scenic design, the

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audiences’ reactions, and the issue of social acceptance. Under the first category, several different strategies, which could be observed between the USA production and the Korean production will be examined; under the second category, how differently the audiences of each country reacted differently to the production will be analyzed; and under the third category, differences in each society’s acceptance of this production will be described. After this, I will provide several possible explanations of what brought about these differences between Korean production and the USA production, mostly based on the oral histories.

In chapter four, the conclusion, I will summarize previously discussed arguments. Together with this, I will suggest several ideas for further research of this topic. One possible topic for further research is the case studies of the Hong Kong production of The Vagina Monologues, which contribute to the notion of the play as a globalized cultural product.

At the end of the chapter four, after a short epilogue, which is a personal essay about this research, a series of appendices are introduced. This will include a table, which illustrates the history of the Korean The Vagina Monologues, an entire list of questions and answers from the interview with Sookryeol Ryu, Korean translator of this work, Roopina Oh, the assistant director of Jina Lee, the second director of this work in Korea, and Jinah Choi, the director of the restaged production.
CHAPTER 2
THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES IN KOREA

Sookryeol Ryu, the Korean translator of *The Vagina Monologues*, learned of Eve Ensler’s work through a 1996 article about it in *The New York Times*. At that time, she was working as a reporter for a newspaper company in Korea, and her assigned position was the international department. Since she was one of the reporters who were in charge of reporting international trends and tendencies to Korean society, she had to read several newspapers and journals from abroad, and *The New York Times* was one of them.²⁴

In the translator’s note to the Korean book version of *The Vagina Monologues*, Ryu confessed that she was fairly shocked when she first read the article about *The Vagina Monologues* because of the title of the play. She said that she was surprised because she found that to use the word ‘vagina’ as a part of title for a play was totally unprecedented. However, when she learned that Gloria Steinem had introduced the play to the public through the article, she came to have another view about the play.²⁵

According to Ryu, the article in the *New York Times* also provides several pieces of contextual information about *The Vagina Monologues*. For example, it notes that numerous famous Hollywood actors, including Glenn Close, Whoopi Goldberg, Susan

²⁵ Ryu 152.
Sarandon, Winona Ryder, Kate Winslet, Melanie Griffith, and Lily Tomlin voluntarily participated in the performance of this piece without any payment, and that every single penny earned from the performance was donated to women refugees in Bosnia. Ryu found these facts interesting, and decided to research *The Vagina Monologues* in more detail.  

As the first step for her research, Ryu made a phone call to one of her friends, Hyunkyung Chung, who is a theologian at The Union Theological Seminary in New York. Ryu and Chung have known each other from the days when they studied together at The Union Theological Seminary. Thanks to Chung, who is close friends with Gloria Steinem, Ryu could access the script relatively easily, and could start to translate Eve Ensler’s work into Korean. In April 2001, the Korean *Vagina Monologues* was eventually published, and the following month it was staged for the first time in Korea.

The first production of *The Vagina Monologues* in Korea was performed at the Jayu theater of Seoul Art Center, from May 18 to June 3, 2001. Hyaekyung Lee directed it, and three professional actors performed: a professional stage actor, Jisook Kim, a professional musical theatre actor, Kyoungmi Lee, and a popular movie star Jiwon Ye. One thing that was ironic about this performance was the fact that the title of the play was not translated into Korean. The production opened under the exact same title as the original production, *The Vagina Monologues*, but with only a Korean inscription of how the English words are pronounced.

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26 Ryu 152.

27 Ryu 152-4.

Even though the word ‘vagina’ was not translated in Korean for its title, the play was sensational enough to be reported by several newspapers. Most reporters focused on the boldness, frankness, and openness of the play. *The Vagina Monologues* was introduced as “A play, which delivers serious discourses about female genitalia in a funny way through the format of interviews.” 29 Gobshik Kim, a news reporter for *The Dong-A Ilbo*, wrote that “Even though *The Vagina Monologues* is the play which has the greatest number of sex-related words in it among recently performed pieces, it is not filthy at all. This may be because this work reflects the message of the vagina’s experience as women’s experience. This is exactly the struggle to resist society’s prejudiced view, which women are being forced to face.” 30

It seemed many people understood or at least tried to understand why Eve Ensler started to create this piece, especially through the format of interviews, and what her attempt meant to the society. However, while there were several friendly and welcoming reactions to this piece, there also were numerous articles and reviews which showed their hostility toward it. For instance, Byoungwook Jang, a news reporter for *The Hankook Ilbo*, stated that “This play is in conflict with a common idea of Korean society because it extols lesbianism very broadly.” 31 Junghoon Yoon, a news reporter for *Dong-A Ilbo* also asked,

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"Will it be possible for Eve Ensler’s work to be accepted effectively and positively as it was accepted previously from the earlier stage (in the USA) in our society which has deep-rooted patriarchal convention?"32

Another point that many articles focused on was the fact that this piece was directed by Hyaekyung Lee, who has great reputation as a feminist activist. Her career began in 1986 when she started to work for Korean Womenlink.33 Korean Womenlink is one of the most representative women organizations in Korea which was established for “Promoting gender equality and a participatory democratic society.”34 Their major activities include “Developing equal labor rights for women, advocating an open family and healthy sex culture, offering consultations on sexual discrimination upon employment, sexual harassment, verbal and physical violence in the workplace, and promoting local grassroots women's movements.”35

On the basis of her work experience at the cultural event planning department of Korean Womenlink from 1986 to 1989, Lee founded an organization for women artists entitled Femiart in 1992. Her various experiences in this field led her to fill various government posts since the late 90s. For example, in 1997 she worked as the chair of the executive committee of International Women’s Film Festival in Seoul; in 1998, she worked

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as a member of the consulting committee on cultural policy for the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism; and from 1999 to 2001, she served as a member of the Council for Performing Arts Promotion and a member of the Women’s Committee of Seoul Metropolitan Government. Notably, since she founded the organization for women artists called Femiart, her activities have become more energetic than ever. Her directing *The Vagina Monologues* can be understood in the same context.\(^{36}\)

In this context, it is not surprising that the reporters focused their attention on her involvement in the production. As a result, she had a great number of opportunities for interviews with several mass media outlets. Through these interviews, Lee clearly revealed why she decided to direct this piece, what her primary theme or concept in directing this piece was, and how she staged this piece in order to deliver what she thought should be delivered.

In an interview with *The Kukmin Ilbo*, one of the daily newspaper companies in Korea, Lee said that in contrast to medical or scientific terminology, “Mention of the vagina from a male point of view tends to be sexual. However, in the case of this play, it shows that there can be a totally different mood in discussing vaginas by dealing with the issue of women’s bodies from a women’s point of view. In this respect, this work is a very brave attempt at discovering women’s sexual identity by revealing women’s pain about their suppressed body.”\(^{37}\) She also said that “If we keep being silent about the gender and sexuality issue, the sex and gender consciousness of Korean society, whose gender concept


is already twisted and biased, will be more and more distorted.” She also revealed her position very clearly regarding the use of the word ‘vagina’ in public: it is impossible to avoid using the word ‘vagina’ in Korean on the stage to correspond with Eve Ensler’s original purpose in creating this piece, namely to break old taboos created by the patriarchal point of view on female genitals.

With regard to her attitude in directing this piece, it is true that some articles revealed their hostility in refined language. However, even though some reviewers revealed their uncertainty and anxiety about whether the message of this production will be positively delivered to the audiences in Korean society, which has a very strict patriarchal system, when it comes to ticket sales the play was greatly successful. According to the record, over 90% of the tickets of this production were successfully sold, and many audiences requested an encore production.

The success of the first production of The Vagina Monologues brought a second production, very shortly after the first production. The second production of this piece had its opening on November 16, and it went on until January 13 of next year, 2002. It was staged at Cult Hall in Daehakroh, the so-called Korean version of Broadway. This


production was directed by Jina Lee and Wai Kit Tang, and performed by Juhee Seo. Jina
Lee is a professional stage and musical theatre director, and Wai Kit Tang is a professional
actor from Hong Kong who also made a career as a director. Juhee Seo, a member of the
Municipal Theatre Company of Seoul, is a well known professional stage actor.\footnote{“Seo Juhee.” Naver.com, 1999. NHN Corp. 10 May 2009 <http://search.naver.com/search.naver?query=%EC%84%9C%EC%A3%BC%ED%9D%AC&where=people_profile&sm=tab_txc&ie=utf8&os=56552>.
} Since
the second production of The Vagina Monologues was presented by a different theatre
company with a different production team and cast members, needless to say, there were
numerous differences between the first and the second production. Among various
differences between the two productions, two points of difference were most noticeable:
the number of cast members in each production and the types of events accompanying the
productions.

The first point of difference, which could be observed between the first
production and the second production, was the fact that the second production was
performed by only one actor, while the first production had three actors in it. Jina Lee
wanted this piece to have more intensive consistency and coherency through all the
monologues. As a means of attaining her goal, she chose to have just one person on the
stage as the messenger of the monologues instead of having more than one cast member on
the stage. Jina Lee regarded all different monologues in this piece as one huge monologue
by dramatizing it in the same way Ensler originally performed this piece, and had Juhee
Seo deliver all of the monologues by herself. By contrast, the director for the first
production of this piece, Hyaekyung Lee, split all the monologues from the piece into three
parts for the three cast members of the first production: Jisook Kim, Kyoungmi Lee, and
Jiwon Ye.

Another point of difference between the first production and the second production is the fact that the second production offered their audience not only the performance, but also a type of post performance discussion. Jina Lee wanted Seo not only to be an actor for this piece, but also to be a host for a type of talk-show follow-up with the audiences.\textsuperscript{43} Lee organized these in such a way as to provide a chance for the audience to have an opportunity to talk about their own experiences about vaginas. Sometimes, professional women such as feminist scholars, female actors, and female pianists were invited to the show as special guests for this talk-session. Sukhee Oh-han, a representative feminist activist of Korea, was one of the invited guests. She was invited to one of the talk sessions, and she said that “I, as a woman activist, have always concentrated on something inside of women, which is invisible. To confess, I have never realized that I have never thought about the visible parts, our own bodies. Now, I clearly know that loving our own bodies is a very good starting point for the feminist movement. I feel like this show is a kind of confession to me.”\textsuperscript{44}

During the run of the second production, \textit{The Vagina Monologues} began to be known as a greatly interesting and highly recommended play in Korea. Accordingly, Juhee Seo also established a great reputation through this theatrical work. However, it is impossible to say whether the intent of Eve Ensler in creating this piece was also shared.


This is because it was not difficult at all to find some articles pointing out the ‘filthiness’ of *The Vagina Monologues*. Kooksung Hwang, a news reporter for *Maeil Business Newspaper*, wrote that “*The Vagina Monologues* delivers a message that ‘sex’ in not always covert and confidential. Therefore, it can be recommended for youth to see it. However, the obscenity of the lines can be a little bit problematic.”\(^{45}\) In another example, Eunkyoung Yang, a news reporter for *The Hankook Ilbo*, used ‘XX’ instead of using the word ‘boji (which means vagina in Korean)’ in her article.\(^{46}\) However, even though there were several conflicts among opinions about the obsceneness of the piece, its popularity grew bigger and bigger as time went by.

Reflecting its growing popularity, *The Vagina Monologues* was restaged again only three months later after the second production. The third production of this piece opened at the Cecil Theatre in Gwanghwamoon, and went on from April 11 to May 19, 2002. This production was also performed by Juhee Seo, and Jina Lee again worked as a director for this production.\(^{47}\)

Since this production was staged by the same production team, there were few differences between the second production and the third production. However, one point of difference was highly noticeable. This is the fact that Jina Lee added live piano music


between the monologues. This directing choice significantly affected the whole atmosphere of this production.

Thanks to this transformation, the third production left a unique impression. If the second production of this piece seemed more like a talk-show rather than a theatrically directed monodrama, the third production was more like a delicately directed solo performance. Indeed, the short live piano pieces added in between the monologues fit into the play very efficiently and beautifully. In addition to this, the piano pieces also worked as a cue for the audiences to applaud and to react. For example, the audience noticed that a monologue is clearly over with no difficulty, and had the opportunity to transit from tense moods created previously. In this manner, the piano pieces played between the monologues effectively helped the audiences to be connected to the performance more intensively.

*The Vagina Monologues*, through its whole process of constantly being reproduced, redirected, and re-presented, gained more and more popularity as time went by. However, the fact that *The Vagina Monologues* acquired a great popularity did not necessarily mean that the crucial message of this piece was disseminated as well. Regarding this, an interesting thing happened between the third production and the fourth production: *The Vagina Monologues* was introduced to the Korean public through television.

If this piece had been introduced to the public through a television program such as an informational program or as a type of cultural news, it would have had the desired effect, because it is fairly common for various cultural events to be introduced through many different types of mass media. However, there was something special in the way *The
Vagina Monologues was introduced. This was because a television series production team introduced this piece through one of the episodes of their show, as opposed to a cultural news reporter doing it through the cultural information program.⁴⁸

Munwha Broadcasting Corporation, MBC, as one of the top three broadcasting companies in Korea, is sometimes called ‘The Kingdom of Dramas.’ This is because this company produces and presents numerous TV series such as soap operas, serial dramas, and documentary dramas. A TV series entitled Confession was one of them. Since the first episode of this show was broadcast on July 1 in 2002, a total of 16 episodes were broadcast until August 20 in 2002, on Mondays and Tuesdays.⁴⁹

There were three main characters in this TV drama: Yoonmi, a doctor who specializes in pediatrics, Dongkyou, Yoonmi’s husband who is an architect, and Youngjoo, an actor who is having an affair with Dongkyou. Their twisted love affair was the main story line of this show. According to the show’s web-site, this series was intended to deliver messages asking important questions about the meaning of marriage and family in the contemporary world.⁵⁰

It seemed that when it came to the program’s intention, this piece was above criticism. However, when it came to the question of propriety, whether this show displayed its messages in proper ways with fitting episodes, it provoked various

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criticisms. For example, the show’s lascivious tone, illustrated through its dialogue, was often pointed out by several mass media outlets. Such criticism extended to several discussions pointing out *Confession*’s sex focused explicit and graphic features, and *The Vagina Monologues* was at the center of this argument. This was because of a scene played by Youngjoo.

Since a Youngjoo is a character whose job is that of an actor, she was described as being involved in several theatre productions one of which was *The Vagina Monologues*. Out of numerous monologues of *The Vagina Monologues*, the director of this TV series, Whamin Lim, decided to have Youngjoo to perform the monologue titled ‘Moaning.’

Sookyoung Kim, a news reporter for *The Dong-A Ilbo* wrote that “In this sequence, Youngjoo was wearing an overly exposed dress, and moaned in a very sexual way.” Sookyoung Kim also described what Youngjoo said in this sequence; “I am a sexy lawyer who loves to moan a lot. Lovers from movies that I watched when I was young, they always made sounds when they were making love to each other. Very wild. (moaning sounds) Strangely, I loved those sounds, so I practiced.”

These lines delivered by Youngjoo in *Confession* are not completely invented.

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In fact, there exists a monologue which has similar lines to what Youngjoo performed in Confession. However, since the portion adapted by Whamin Lim had its entire focus on having Youngjoo be presented more sexually and seductively as opposed to the original monologue written by Eve Ensler, which dealt with the importance of realizing women’s own desire and admitting it,⁵⁵ what was performed by Youngjoo did not seem to be a fair use of The Vagina Monologues.

It is true that the way in which the production team of Confession used a part of The Vagina Monologues for their TV series does not represent how The Vagina Monologues was accepted in Korean society. However, it is equally true that this event was worth noticing, because it clearly showed what kind of impressions The Vagina Monologues left behind, at least on some people such as the production team of Confession.

In 2003, the fourth production of The Vagina Monologues opened on December 24, and continued until January 18, 2004. It was directed by Donghoon Nam, and performed by Juhee Seo. The location for this performance was Dongsung Art Center in Daehakroh.⁵⁶ This time, as before, the popularity of the original production was reported several times through numerous newspapers, as well as its social meaning. Beginning with this production, the Korean Vagina Monologues started to be mentioned more earnestly as a representative feminist play, and serious efforts to adapt this piece in a locally meaningful way, based on Korean socio-cultural contexts, was clearer.

⁵⁵ Ensler 105-11.

Juhee Seo said that “The original production of this piece is based on feminist discourses; however, what I am trying to do is not necessarily like this. What I want to do through performing this piece is more about delivering various stories of women who are living in contemporary Korean society.”

Several organizations for women in Korea revealed their opinion of this piece in a similar way. The Korean Foundation for Women sponsored this production by inviting some women who were socially or economically disadvantaged and paying the admissions for the invited audiences.

In an interview with a news reporter, Juhee Seo revealed her personal opinions about this piece: “I can speak out the word vagina very confidently, without any hesitation, but this is only true when I am on the stage. Yes, even me; it is still very hard to say the word vagina out loud unless I am delivering the lines which have those words in them.” She also said that “I guess that this is because the word vagina has a very complicated meaning in our real lives while it can be defined very simply by the dictionary.”

Juhee Seo also said that her position about this piece is not perfectly corresponding with Eve Ensler’s. According to Juhee Seo, “I actually have a different

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standpoint from Eve Ensler’s. Needless to say, I agree with her that this society does not regard men and women equally. However, I am not as aggressive as her about this issue. It is one of the points which makes me feel difficulty in performing this piece.”

In 2004, as an article was written about Eve Ensler’s new work *The Good Body*, *The Vagina Monologues* became a hot topic of conversation once again, and reopened as the fifth production again with Seo. It opened on November 12 and closed on December 31. The location for the performance was Woorim CheongdamTheatre in Gangnam, Seoul.

Jinah Choi, the new director of this production, focused on the fact there are many male audience members as well as female audience members. According to one article, over 30% of the audience members were male. This fact was pointed out as a noticeable change that had not been seen in the first, second, third, or fourth productions. Jinah Choi is one of the representatively young professional directors in Korea. She built her reputation directing numerous pieces, which deal with such topics as the relationship between men and women or women’s emotions.

According to the director’s program note, Choi wanted this production to be more intimate and familiar to the audience, compared to previous productions. At the same time, she also wanted this production to be lighter and more festive. She said, “I

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think that the original version of this piece is a little bit too didactic. Even though I strongly agree with the play’s message, I do not entirely agree with the way it delivers its message to the public.” 64 This is why Jinah Choi wanted this production to have more lightness and hilarity in it.

In an interview with a news reporter for *The Kyunghyang Shinmun*, she said, “To me, it seems that this piece sometimes ascribes too many meanings to the word ‘vagina.’ But, I don’t think that this piece should be so serious.” 65 She revealed her intention in directing this piece by saying “I just want to deliver several stories of ourselves sharing the same times and places, as women. Having this piece be solidly educational or provoking several discussions about this issue is not my first goal in directing this piece.” 66

Thanks to Jinah Choi’s effort to localize this piece as better fitting Korean society and Juhee Seo’s masterly skill in performing this piece based on her past experience, this production elicited many of favorable comments from various critics. For example, Sangyoung Jung, a news reporter for *Hankyoreh Shinmun*, reported that, “Even though this production was not a Korean premiere, the impression it left was fairly fresh. Especially, I think that the event offered the audience an opportunity to write a ‘two-line


poem with the word vagina’ was a really good fitting event.” What Jung refers to here is a particularly Korean casual word game, where every syllable of a word, becomes the beginning of a new line of poetry. In this case, at the end of the performance, Seo, the actor, announced the game using the Korean word ‘vagina’ as the source for the poem-making. The audience shouted spontaneously the syllables, and Seo improvised a line of poetry. At the performance I attended Seo asked for a volunteer to take her place, and a spectator was chosen to create the poetic line in response to the audience’s shouted syllables.

2004 was a memorable year in tracking the history of the Korean The Vagina Monologues, not only because of the great success of the restaged production of this piece, but also in another way. This is because in 2004 the members of V-Day, an organization for women founded on the proceeds from The Vagina Monologues, visited Korea for the first time from the USA.

On December 1, at a press interview organized by the Korea Council for comfort women, Hibaaq Osman, one of the representatives of V-Day, said that “Whenever a war happens, women have to face seriously threatening situations, such as rape or sexual abuse. When I came to know about the comfort women in Korea who are victims of World War II, I cried. From now on, V-Day will support their activities in

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various ways.” She also said that V-Day set the issue of comfort women as their crucial agenda for their 2005 campaigns. This event was reported several times through various mass media outlets. However, strangely, even though the Korean *Vagina Monologues*’ season was open while Osman was visiting Korea, the connection between the V-Day and *The Vagina Monologues* was not seriously mentioned during this event.

In 2006, there was another pivotal event in the history of the Korean *Vagina Monologues*. This was its reopening with a new cast member: instead of Juhee Seo, who performed this piece for 4 years from the second production in 2001 to the fifth production in 2004, Yongnam Jang was cast as the solo performer. She, like Juhee Seo, had a good reputation as a professional stage actor. Jina Lee, who already had been involved in this piece several times, again directed it. This production was opened at the Dure Hall in Dachakroh in Seoul, and it was performed from September 15 to November 12.

As this piece always had been performed by Juhee Seo since the second production, the news of its newest cast member stimulated curiosity about the new production of this piece. Needless to say, many news reporters focused on reporting various pieces of background information on Youngnam Jang including her personal


history, reputation as an actor, her reasons for choosing this piece, and her main concept and principle theme in performing this piece. To introduce Youngnam Jang’s biography briefly, she started to build her career as an actor in 1995. Since then, she has been a member of the Theatre Company Mokwha, and has been involved in several productions with this company such as *Hamlet, Hwan, Romeo and Juliet,* and *The Green Room.* In 2001 she received a Backsang Art Award for ‘Best New Actress,’ and in 2002 she was awarded a Dongah Play Award for ‘Best Actress of the Year.’ She also worked for several TV series and movies as well. For example, she played a role in a movie entitled *Someone Special* in 2004, and *The Big Scene* in 2005. Because of the fact that she already had played several roles in television and movies, her fame stimulated the public’s curiosity about the 6th production of *The Vagina Monologues.*

In an interview with a news reporter for *The Seoul Shinmun,* Youngnam Jang shared the impressions she got from her experience as an audience member of one of the past productions. She said, “Once, I saw this piece performed by Juhee Seo. It was very shocking and novel to me. I still recall the moments that I laughed a lot because of its embarrassing lines. But, most of all, since Juhee Seo’s performance was so impressive, I could not take my eyes off of her.” According to Youngsook Kim, a news reporter for Sports Seoul, Youngnam Jang confessed, “Actually, what Juhee Seo did in past productions imposes a heavy burden on me, because she really did a great job. However,

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I always wanted to have a chance to perform this piece. This is why I decided to be involved in this production.”

Regarding this production, the fact that Youngnam Jang was cast as a performer instead of Juhee Seo was not the only point which got the public’s attention. Jina Lee’s return as a director was also mentioned as a meaningful change which made this production distinguishable from the last two productions. This is because like Juhee Seo, Jina Lee also obtained a great reputation based on her experiences in directing several productions of *The Vagina Monologues*. Not only among general audiences, but also among the professional critics, the fact that Jina Lee directed this piece in 2001 and 2002 is continuously mentioned in the mass media. In addition to this, some other directors who were involved in this piece after Jina Lee, sometimes tried to imitate how Jina Lee directed this piece. These two facts show that Jina Lee has had a great influence on the Korean *Vagina Monologues*.

Jina Lee successfully made two significant changes in the script for this production. The first change that she made was adding a monologue which had been continuously discarded previously. From 2001 to 2006, a monologue entitled “Angry Vagina” had never been performed on the Korean stage. This monologue was regarded as inappropriately aggressive and direct. However, Jina Lee decided to restore this monologue. As a person who has observed the history of *The Vagina Monologues* in Korea from a very close distance, Jina Lee thought that it was the right time to have this play be more radical and more sensational. For this reason, she added the monologue

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called “Angry Vagina,” and the audience reacted to this monologue enthusiastically.\textsuperscript{75}

Besides adding this monologue, she also made another change. It involved reflecting the audiences’ own experiences about vaginas. In order to do this, the production team members promoted a special activity through their company’s web-site. They asked people to share their ‘vagina stories’, and based on this voluntary public participation, Jina Lee selected one of the stories for her performance. This monologue was performed under the title “A Letter from an Audience.”\textsuperscript{76} This new addition was mentioned numerous times in the press. This was because Jina Lee’s attempt to include the audience’s own voice was exactly what Eve Ensler had also tried.

In addition to this, there also were two cultural events, which made this production more popular. One event was entitled “Female Bodies,” and the other was called “The 1st Mono-Festival.”\textsuperscript{77} “Female Bodies” was planned and organized by Iftopia, an organization for women artists. A cultural events planning group based on feminism, Iftopia was founded in March 2003. The title of this organization Iftopia is a compound word of ‘IF’ which is an abbreviation for ‘I’m a Feminist’ or ‘Infinite Feminist’ and the word ‘utopia.’ This organization has supported numerous women artists in Korea since it was first founded. This organization also planned various cultural events such as the Korean Women Festival, Dream Concert for Korean Women, and Anti-Miss


Korea. Through these events, they have tried to create a new atmosphere based on the principle of equality of men and women.\(^7\)

The second event, “Female Bodies,” was a type of trilogy composed of three different activities: a forum, a festival for women, and a production of *The Vagina Monologues*. The forum was opened on the September 6th with the keynote speech of Professor Youngok Kim, who is also a professional researcher for the Korean Women Research Center. In this forum, several subject matters were discussed, which are related to women’s bodies such as commercialism, diet, and plastic surgery. As panelists, many professional women took part, including feminist scholar Sukhee Oh-han, feminist film critic Jina You, woman lawyer Sunmi Jin, and a psychologist Nami Lee.

As the second part of the trilogy, The 4th Korean Women Festival was planned. This event was opened on October 3 in 2003. In this festival, various forms of cultural events were offered for Korean women.\(^9\)

*The Vagina Monologues* was the last part of this trilogy. The connection between *The Vagina Monologues* and “Female Bodies” significantly contributed to the production’s ticket sales. This was because “Female Bodies” was covered by various mass media in great depth. This automatically had the effect of advertisement for the production and that effect spilled over into ticket sales for the production.

The other cultural event which contributed to the popularity of the production was “The 1st Mono-Festival.” Originally, this event was organized in memory of

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Songwoong Choo, a famous actor in Korea who had a great reputation with his performances in monodrama. Since 2006 was the 20th anniversary of Songwoong Choo’s death, his son, Sangwook Choo, who is also a representative of the Entertainment Business Company Gaeul, wanted to open a small stage to cherish the memory of his father. However, his original intention expanded to include a festival for monodramas. This was possible because many individuals in the theatre scene revealed their serious interest in monodramas.  

Acting on the basis of many people’s interests in monodramas, Songwoong Choo decided to design a festival for monodramas, rather than opening a small production for his dead father. For this festival, a total of six productions were selected as participating productions: Mr. You: the Undertaker, Beggars: Wingless Angles, Queen Myoungsung: I Have Something to Say, The Vagina Monologues, An Unmannerly Widow, and The Tiger Lady. Since this event was the first monodrama festival in Korea, it received great attention from the public. Naturally, this project was reported in the mass media repeatedly, making such publicity impact The Vagina Monologues as well. This festival not only publicized the participating productions, but also offered tickets for participating productions with discounted prices, which greatly contributed to the ticket sales of this production.

The 6th production of The Vagina Monologues was also a great success. Abundant reviews about this production reflected this fact. Several reviewers noted that

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the atmosphere of this production was greatly changed from the previous ones. They especially pointed out that this production was more vivid, witty, and animated compared to its past incarnations.82

Soohyun Kim, a news reporter for SBS (Seoul Broadcasting System), reported that “The vagina was regarded as an embarrassing body part, for a long time, despite its significant function as one of important body parts. However, The Vagina Monologues delivers the story about the vagina with a very light touch.”83 Youjin Lee, a news reporter for Hankyoreh Shinmun, also reported that “This production was presented with a relatively freer atmosphere compared to the past productions. It was not like porn, and at the same time, it was not like an enforcing a feminist agenda.”84 The fact that audience reactions have changed was also often reported. Numerous news reporters stated that in the case of this production, audiences’ reactions were fairly different compared to the past productions. As the reasons for this, they cited the changed atmosphere of the production, as well as the fact that this production tried to have their audiences be involved even before its opening by encouraging them to share their own stories through the website.

While there were no significant productions of The Vagina Monologues in Seoul in 2007, there were several events connected with the play. First, “V-Day 2007” opened. Second, The Vagina Monologues was presented in a local theatre other than Seoul for the first time in Korea. Third, a book entitled Bitches was published. Fourth, a


modern dance version of The Vagina Monologues was presented in a provincial city.

On the third and fourth of March 2007, there was a special event called V-day 2007 at a small live club in Seoul. Even though it was not a formally produced production of The Vagina Monologues, V-Day 2007 presented some parts of The Vagina Monologues on the stage. While previous productions of this piece focused on the quality of the productions as professional theatrical events, V-Day 2007 concentrated on the matter of publicizing V-Day itself. V-Day 2007 planners included volunteer workers for the House of Sharing, a shelter for comfort women from World War II. According to Jungsun Kim, a news reporter for Yonhap News Agency, they planned this event to express their support for the V-Day World Campaign for stopping all violence against women and girls. During the event, they not only performed a piece of The Vagina Monologues, but also specifically introduced the history of V-Day and their numerous activities happening all around the world. Together with this, they donated all the proceeds from the event to the Korea Women’s Hot Line, which is one of the non-governmental organizations for women's human rights in Korea.

On the 8th of March, the Theatre Company Eunha, a local theatre company in Pohang, presented The Vagina Monologues. Even though there have been numerous productions of this piece since The Vagina Monologues was first performed in Korea, so far all of the productions opened in Seoul. Since this was the first time that The Vagina Monologues opened in a provincial city and not in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea, it was a very meaningful event, despite its inferior theatre facilities. Regional towns are

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known to have significantly lower attendance at theatres than a large city like Seoul. It was unusual, therefore, that the production ran for three months and had modest audiences.

It was true that there were relatively inferior surroundings in terms of the size of the house or the general state of the facilities. However, the production was performed for a full three months, and while it played, a fair number of audiences appreciated it.86

The publication of a book entitled *The Bitches*87 was another event which is related to *The Vagina Monologues*. The full title of *The Bitches* is “Being Born as Women Evolves into Bitches.” This book contains nine interviews with nine women who are usually regarded as great role models for young women.88 The author of this book, Myounghee Lee, revealed that she wrote this book in order to deliver these nine women’s unique points of view about life, their own philosophies, and most of all, their wisdom based on their own personal experiences. To highlight the ironic fact that some women who are highly independent, extremely radical, or exceptionally enterprising are sometimes called ‘bitches,’ Myounghee Lee named this book *The Bitches*.89 The relationship between this book and *The Vagina Monologues* lies in the list of the selected nine women. This is because out of the nine, four interviewees are linked to *The Vagina

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Monologues in some way. They are Eve Ensler, who created the piece, Sookryeol Ryu, who translated this play into Korean, Gloria Steinem, who wrote the foreword for a book version of this piece in the USA, and Hyunkyoung Jung, who introduced The Vagina Monologues to Sookryeol Ryu in order for her to translate it.\(^{90}\) Needless to say, the publication of this book put The Vagina Monologues in the spotlight, once again.

Another event which contributed to the popularity of The Vagina Monologues was a modern dance version of The Vagina Monologues presented in Daegu, a provincial city in Korea, during the festival entitled “The 12th Week for Women.” The festival was held by the Daegu city hall with the aim of supporting the development of women, promoting the equality of the sexes, and spreading healthy family culture. Under the slogan of “The Future of Daegu is Women’s Power,” numerous events were presented such as a commemorative ceremony, conference, forum, and several celebratory events.\(^{91}\)

The modern dance version of The Vagina Monologues was one of these celebratory events. A municipal dance company of Daegu dramatized Eve Ensler’s work into a new form of art by attempting to deliver the message of The Vagina Monologues through modern dance. However, it was not possible to deliver all of the message of the play with the movements only, because the significance of the actual words cannot be ignored, especially in the case of The Vagina Monologues. Thus, what the municipal dance company of Daegu decided to do was deliver the messages not only through the movements but also through text as well.


Thanks to the accompanying choreography, which worked very efficiently to deliver the message of the piece, *The Vagina Monologues* presented by the municipal dance company of Daegu was favorably commented on not only by various local mass media, but also by several national media. Seijung Choi, a news reporter for *The Maeil Shinmun*, reported that “Even though the main theme of the piece was unprecedented and highly unconventional, the piece was produced without causing a negative response from the audience.”

Last year, 2008, was the 10th anniversary of V-Day. Several commemorative ceremonies celebrated the past 10 years of V-Day, and the 10th Anniversary Edition of *The Vagina Monologues* was published in the USA as well as Eve Ensler’s newest work, *Insecure At Last*. In the 10th Anniversary Edition of *The Vagina Monologues*, V-Day’s work and activities for past ten years was specifically introduced under the section entitled “V-Day Timeline,” together with the history of *The Vagina Monologues*.

In Korea, as well as in the USA, several commemorative ceremonies were held. The event entitled “V-Day Seoul” was representative. On March 15 and 16, at the Art Hall of Jungang University in Seoul, “V-Day Seoul” was held. As a part of this event, *The Vagina Monologues* was presented onstage. This production was directed by Jungah Kim, and performed by several amateur actors.

According to Kyounglee Seo, a news reporter for *Newsis*, V-Day Seoul was

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planned with four goals. First, it was to promote and publicize the organization V-Day and their activities; second, to express support for the aim of V-Day – stopping all violence against women; third, to break old taboos about (female) sex in Korea; and fourth, to establish a fund for women who were victimized by the sex trade. Indeed, all the proceeds from the show were donated to an organization for Dasi-Hamke Center, a shelter for victims of the sex trade.\footnote{Seo, Kyounglee. “Anti-Violence Movement for Women – \textit{The Vagina Monologues}.” Newsis 15 Mar. 2008. 10 May 2009 \textlanglehttp://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=102&oid=003&aid=0002004590\rangle.}

This production distinguished itself from the past productions by three points. First, this production was performed by amateur actors. Second, this event’s focus was on publicizing V-Day and its activity, and not on presenting a quality show. Third, this production was performed in English and in Korean. To put this in another way, it was a performance delivered in two languages in an order. The director Jungah Kim explained that she had this piece performed in two different languages because she wanted to deliver this piece to foreign women who are living in Korea and who have difficulty understanding Korean, as well as to Korean women. By doing this, she wanted to make the point that the issue of the female body is not a national problem, but an international problem.\footnote{Seo, Kyounglee. “Anti-Violence Movement for Women – \textit{The Vagina Monologues}.” Newsis 15 Mar. 2008. 10 May 2009 \textlanglehttp://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=102&oid=003&aid=0002004590\rangle.}

Since \textit{The Vagina Monologues} was first translated, staged and performed in 2001, there were numerous productions of this piece in Korea. From 2001 to 2008, there were a total of six productions of this piece performed by professional actors in Seoul,
two productions undertaken in smaller cities, and two additional productions performed by amateur actors. Some of them were performed by the same actor, and some of them were not; some were directed by the same person, and some of them were not. In this way, the production team for each production was different from the others. Likewise, in the matter of location, all of them were staged at different theatres. In addition to this, in terms of directing, the productions’ dramatization, adaptation, and style were different from one another. Indeed, even though they were all based on the same piece, each of them was uniquely designed and created very distinct atmospheres in the process of staging.

However, even though it is true that they are different from one another in many ways, it is equally true that they are very similar to one another in some respects. In particular, comparing one Korean production to Eve Ensler’s original work allows us to observe how they were similar to one another. There are three key points which allow us to place all of the Korean productions in the same category, as opposed to the USA production, despite their numerous differences. These are scenic design, audiences’ reaction, and social acceptance of the piece, which I will discuss in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3
THE DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Many arguments are possible in comparing the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues* to the USA production of the same piece. For example, one could compare the different manufacturing processes of Korean and American theatre. Observing the different manufacturing systems and investigating how each production system affected their respective output would be a very interesting and meaningful method. As another example, scrutinizing the differences between where this piece was presented in the USA and in Korea, including the size of their respective houses, would also be worth researching. In addition to this, examining the matter of how *The Vagina Monologues* was advertised differently to the public in the Korean and the American markets can also be significant.

However, in this chapter, of the numerous possible comparisons which can be drawn between the Korean and the USA productions of *The Vagina Monologues*, only three subjects will be covered. These are the matter of design, the difference between Korean and American audience reaction to the play, and the issue of translation and societal acceptance. This is because these three subjects are the points of argument, which will allow us to take advantage of the case study of *The Vagina Monologues*. The case discussed here is not highly crucial in examining the matter of the different production
systems of Korea and the USA or investigating the advertising strategies which are observed differently in the Korean market and the American market. Such arguments are more about the contexts of the Korean and American theatre scenes. In other words, since the matter of different production systems of Korea and the USA or the different advertising strategies in Korean theatre market and American theatre market are fairly general topics, they can be researched with other cases besides *The Vagina Monologues*.

However, in the case of the three issues which will be discussed in this chapter – design, audience reaction, and translation and societal acceptance – all three crucially depend on the case selected for the topic. In other words, it will be impossible to observe similar results if these issues were researched with a case study other than *The Vagina Monologues*. In this respect, to take advantage of the case under discussion, I decided to focus on these three points of arguments in discussing the differences between the Korean version and the USA production of the same piece.

In making a comparative study of the Korean and the USA productions, I have examined one production from each country as primary sources. For the Korean production, I mainly referred to the fifth production, which was presented by PMC production, translated by Sookryeol Ryu, adapted and directed by Jinah Choi, performed by Juhee Seo, and staged at the Woorim Cheongdam Theater in Seoul in 2004. I observed this production as one of the audience members in December 2004. For the USA production, the documentary recording of *The Vagina Monologues*, which contains the entire performance of Eve Ensler, was my main point of reference. This documentary

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was edited by Paula Heredia based on Eve Ensler’s original performance, and originally broadcast on the Home Box Office (HBO) cable television channel in 2001.98

Among the numerous differences which can be observed between the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues* and the USA production of the same play, the different designs are one of the most obvious dissimilarities. According to the documentary film broadcast by HBO in 2001, there was only a single bar stool on the stage. It was installed at the center of a proscenium stage, with a microphone and a stand for the microphone. Except these three things, the stage was totally empty. There was no backdrop at the background of the stage, just dark red colored curtains. The theatre lighting not only lit the stage but also the house. This allowed Eve Ensler to interact with her audience through eye contact while she was performing. While the performance was going on, Eve Ensler was usually seated on the bar stool installed at the center of the stage. She was wearing a black sleeveless one-piece dress while she was performing the monologues, and her black hair was short with bangs. The only stage properties that she used during her performance were a barstool, a microphone, and a stand for the microphone. Sometimes, she was holding a small stack of index cards which had some text on them in her hand, but they were only used when she was reading a letter from an audience member out loud. Indeed, the stage was very simply designed.

However, it was impossible for the Korean audience to appreciate this piece on such a simple stage. This was because every Korean production of this piece was performed on a relatively fully designed stage compared to the USA production. For example, the 5th production, which was directed by Jinah Choi and performed by Juhee

Seo at the Woorim Cheongdam theatre in Seoul, can be pointed out as a representative case. Juhee Seo, a professional Korean actor who became celebrated for her multi-year performances of *The Vagina Monologues*, performed in a fully designed set, while Eve Ensler only performed this piece with a single bar-stool.

In contrast, the Korean production team used a comfortable armchair instead of the bar stool. This armchair was installed on three layers of area rugs. There was also a circular small side table on the carpets, next to the armchair. On this table, several stage properties such as cards, letters, and envelopes were ready to be used. At upstage center, a huge frame was also installed behind the armchair and the side table. On the left side of the upstage, a grand piano was ready to be played. In this way, while the USA production used a minimalist set, the Korean production of this piece was staged with a delicate scenic design including a huge empty frame, carpet, small table, and a comfortable chair.

In terms of the costume for the performer, these two productions differed greatly from each other. While Eve Ensler wore a black sleeveless one-piece dress, Juhee Seo wore a beige colored dress. Unlike what Eve Ensler wore, Juhee Seo’s costume looked like it was especially produced for the performance. She wore a beige-colored long-sleeved top and a long skirt of the same color. Under the skirt, she wore similarly-colored long pants as well. During the performance, Juhee Seo took advantage of this costume. She sometimes rolled up her skirt in order for her to look as if she were wearing just a pair of pants, and sometimes took off a piece of the costume to look like a different person. In this way, Juhee Seo made some changes with her costume from monologue to monologue, while Eve Ensler did not change her clothes from the beginning of the show.
to the end of the performance.

To observe numerous differences between several productions of the same piece is fairly common and usual. This is because it is essentially required for every production team to have its own theme and concept in the matter of staging. Needless to say, the chosen theme and production concept affects the whole process of producing, from script to stage. As a result, we can appreciate numerous variations on the stage, which started to be produced from the same script. It is often said that this is one of the essential aspects of theatrical productions. In this respect, it is not at all surprising to observe numerous differences between Korean and USA productions of *The Vagina Monologues*.

While there are obvious common features between different Korean and the USA productions, can we simply say that they are caused by the different theme and concept of each production team? Or are there any other possibilities to view these differences as caused by cultural differences beyond the individual characteristics of each production team?

Regarding this, the Korean director of the 2004 production of *The Vagina Monologues*, Jinah Choi, suggests that the different theatrical conventions must have been one of the most significant points which caused several differences between Korean productions and the USA production, especially in terms of design matters such as set design, costume design, and light design.

Frankly, I am not sure if I can call this a theatrical ‘convention’ of Korean theatre scene, but I am pretty sure that there is a kind of clear tendency in
the Korean theatre scene. As you have seen, in the 2004 production of *The Vagina Monologues*, I sometimes let Juhee Seo just read a monologue, not ‘perform’ the monologue. Do you think the audience would have accepted that as a play if I had directed all of the monologues in the same way? I don’t think so. They would have called it a kind of recitation rather than a performance. That was why I needed to have some type of theatrical props on the stage as well as variations. A Korean audience always wants to see something spectacular on the stage in terms of visualization. They want to see something they cannot do, but the performers can. Having a sophisticated scenic design sometimes can be one of the simplest ways to achieve this goal. And, I think that this is normal for every Korean production regardless of the size of the theatre. That may be why it is very easy for all of us to appreciate numerous productions, which are presented with spectacular scenic design in Korea.99

In this way, to account for the numerous differences between the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues* and the USA production in terms of design, she pointed to the different “tendencies” of Korea and the USA as one of the most significant reasons. She suggested that the differences observed in terms of costume design and lighting design can be explained under the same context. In her personal oral history, she confessed that she felt that what her production team did in designing the set for the 2004 production was not enough:

Actually, I wanted to add something more to the stage. However, I could not do that for basically two reasons. First, the way this piece was written did not really match a fully designed set. As you know, this piece is a series of monologues. Every monologue has a different background setting time and place. It would have been very difficult if I tried to present every time and place, which works as a background for a monologue with the scenic design, not in a symbolic or a metaphoric way, but in a descriptive or a depictive way the scenic design. So, what I did was take advantage of lighting design and costume design. By having some changes in costume and lighting design, I could build a type of individual atmosphere from one monologue to another.¹⁰⁰

She also mentioned the practical context, which prevented her from adding more scenic design pieces and stage properties on the stage:

As you know, I was involved in the fifth production of *The Vagina Monologues* in Korea. Once I was involved, it was already well-known to the public thanks to the great successes of several previous productions. The company, which hired me as the director did not want me to make many changes. So, frankly, I did not have unlimited rights to direct this piece. If I had unlimited rights to direct this piece as I wanted, it would

have been very different from what you have seen.\textsuperscript{101}

She also discussed the relationship between Korean theatre and the form of monodrama in terms of cultural appropriateness. According to her, the genre of solo performance is not very compatible with the modern Korean theatre scene.

Having interactions with the audiences is truly important in every kind of stage performances, I think. The same goes for Korean theatre, of course. However, ‘presenting’ ‘displaying,’ and ‘performing’ are as crucial as building interactions with the audiences in Korean theatre. What I mean by this is that Korean audiences are relatively more passive than Western audiences. Sometimes, they just want to ‘appreciate’ what is happening on the stage without any active participation. However, in many cases of monodrama, the piece requires the performer to interact with the audience more directly, as compared to the pieces which have more than two performers. The case of \textit{The Vagina Monologues} is not an exception. The performer continuously asks questions expecting to hear some answers from the audience. However, in my opinion, this was not very normal until quite recently. In this context, I am sometimes wondering whether a form of so-called monodrama is a really good fit for the Korean theatre scene or

\textsuperscript{101} Choi, Jinah. Personal Interview. 6 Aug. 2008.
According to Jinah Choi, the reason why live piano pieces were added only in the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues* can be explained in the same context. Since modern Korean theatre tends to focus on visual and aural spectacle as opposed to focusing on the text, the differences between Korean productions and the USA productions were accomplished through design. Joy Reilly and M. Scott Phillips have argued that “The success of the various theatre artists in achieving their artistic illusion is dependent not only on the skill with which they do their jobs, but also on the conventions that pertain at the time of the production.”103 It seems that Choi’s statement about “tendencies” is also applicable to the location of the production, as well as the time of the production. Even though it is true that “The conventions in theatre are always changing,” it is equally true that they always have a great influence on most productions. In this context, the reason why the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues* and the USA production of the same piece displayed a great number of differences from each other in terms of design can be understood as a result of negotiation on the part of Korean productions, between the intention to preserve a maximum of originality in the imported piece and the effort to adjust the piece to the theatrical conventions of the place where it is reproduced.

Another significant difference between the Korean production of *The Vagina


Monologues, and the USA production of the same piece is discovered upon examining the audiences’ involvement with the play. This is because it is possible to observe several active efforts to involve USA audiences in performance of the piece, while there are few such efforts involving Korean audiences. There are two significant examples which allow us to claim that the USA audiences were much more involved in the play as compared to the Korean audiences. The first example is the fact that USA audiences actively participated in developing The Vagina Monologues in terms of diversity and quality by actively revealing their reactions to this piece. The second example is the fact that many of the USA audiences supported the establishment of V-Day, an organization for stopping all violence against women and girls.

In the USA, the audiences of The Vagina Monologues did not get carried away with temporary enthusiasm, but also supported this work beyond the theatrical space. To be more specific, Eve Ensler got a great number of letters from members of the audience. Some gave advice about her monologues, others let Ensler know how they felt about her work, and some of them shared their stories with her. As a result, Ensler could add more monologues to her work based on audience response. Eve Ensler’s revisions and additions to the script, made by her audiences’ active reactions, resulted in a new edition of the play in 2008.

In addition to this, the USA audiences helped to establish V-Day, a global movement that supports anti-violence organizations for women throughout the world. According to the ‘V-timeline’ printed in the 10th anniversary edition of The Vagina Monologues, “V-Day began with a 2,500-seat, sold-out benefit performance of The
Vagina Monologues on February 14, 1998, at New York City’s Hammerstein Ballroom, raising $250,000 for local antiviolence groups.” The V-Day movement has grown rapidly in ten years, and now, it has turned into a well established nonprofit organization. It has expanded its core work on the ground, while drawing public attention to the larger fight to stop worldwide violence against women and girls, including rape, battery, incest, female genital mutilation (FGM), and sexual slavery. It is true that The Vagina Monologues worked as a catalyst for this, but it is equally true that without the audiences’ constant support, V-Day and its program of feminist activism would not have happened.

However, as opposed to what happened in the USA, it was barely possible to observe similar audience participation in Korea. Indeed, there were no such audience activities beyond the stage, except the fact that there appeared several fan-club web sites for Juhee Seo, who was involved in this piece as a performer in 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004. The question is what made the American audience of The Vagina Monologues so strongly involved in this play and revealed a support that extended well beyond the stage, in contrast to the Korean production. With regard to this matter, Sookryeol Ryu, the translator of The Vagina Monologues into Korean, points out that the Korean productions and the USA production were presented under different conditions from each other may be the primary reason.

If someone asks me what I think the factors, which caused a huge reaction to The Vagina Monologues of the USA audiences were, I would answer that it must be the power of truth. As you know, Eve Ensler, the creator of
this piece, interviewed more than two hundred women in order to create this piece. By herself. Many of the monologues in this piece are based on true stories. And all of them were transformed, reworked, and presented by the same person, the original source collector who can deliver the intention of the piece best. I think that this fact – that the piece was performed by the original creator who collected numerous ‘true stories’ by interviewing more than two hundred women with incredible enthusiasm about this issue in order to create the piece – maximized its power. How could it be more powerful than this? I think that it must have worked as one of the important factors, which contributed to evoke the audiences’ sympathy to this piece, in a very significant way. However, in the case of Korean productions, the situation was quite different.\footnote{Ryu, Sookryeol. Personal Interview. 4 Aug. 2008.}

With regard to what Ryu said, if we return to Aristotle’s model for communication, which I discussed in the introduction, \textit{The Vagina Monologues} provides a fascinating example of the shifting emphasis within the three-part model. In the original production, Ensler is the performer/creator or “Ethos” according to Aristotle and speaker according to communication studies. The script is the communicated message, or “Logos.” The audience is the receiver, or “Pathos.” It is possible to think that “Logos” – the script, with its ground-breaking nature that led to a social movement focused on violence against women, dominates both Ensler and the audience. However, in the case of the Korean production, “Logos” – the script did not have a dominating power as it had
in the USA production. According to Ryu, this is because, first, in the case of Korean production, the piece needed to be translated into another language – into Korean, from its original language – English, and, second, unlike the USA production, in the case of Korean production, the creator of this work and its performer were not the same person.

Most of all, the piece needed to be translated into Korean. Of course, I, as a translator of this piece into Korean, did my best not to lose any significant meanings of some words, contexts, and situations in the process of translating, but how could this be possible unless this piece were originally written in Korean? Second, this play was performed by someone who is not the original creator of this piece. Throughout the rehearsal process, we did our best to have the actors understood the original intention of Eve Ensler, but it was very difficult. For example, we had quite a hard time casting some actors for the first production of the piece. This was because there were several actors who refused our requests to be involved in the show. Not all of them, but some of them clearly revealed the reasons for their refusals to our request. They said that they did not want to be branded feminists. While Eve Ensler delivered her texts from the bottom of her heart and with a sense of duty, Korean actors ‘acted’ it. How could they arouse same reactions from their own audiences?

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While Sookryeol Ryu pointed out the fact that the Korean production and the USA production were presented under different conditions as a possible reason why the USA audiences and the Korean audiences reacted to the same piece highly differently from each other, Jinah Choi claimed that cultural differences between Korean audiences and USA audiences can also be a possible reasons why they reacted to this piece so differently from each other. In her opinion, Korean audiences are not as active in the contemporary Korean theatre scene as they were in traditional Korean theatre scenes. She explained the liveliness of Korean audience in traditional days, using the case of Pansori performance as an example. According to Jinah Choi, several historical sources dealing with the traditional performances of Korea show that Korean audiences of those days were strongly involved in the performances. She claims that Pansori is one of the most representative examples. Pansori is a genre of Korean music. It is vocal and percussive music performed by one ‘sorikkun’ and one ‘gosu.’ ‘Sorikkun’ means a singer and ‘gosu’ means a drummer playing a barrel drum called ‘buk.’

In the case of Pansori, audiences took an active part in the performance. They not only appreciated what the performer did, but also encouraged and assisted the performer by bringing some adlib or improvisational rhythm called ‘chuimsae’ into the piece. Since having an intimate interaction between the audience and the performer was extremely important in Pansori, those fragments added by audiences were

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considered as one of the top three important factors in the Pansori performance. However, in the modern Korean theatre scene, it is really hard to see this kind of audience involvement.\textsuperscript{107}

She claims that since Western style theatre was imported into Korea, the attitudes of Korean audiences to the stage performances have been highly changed. According to her, since Western theatres started to be widespread, Korean audiences started to just ‘appreciate’ the performances.

I think that this can be explained in relationship with the modern history of Korea. In the early era of modern Korean society, understanding and having experienced Western culture and was considered a sign of one’s sophistication. The concept of ‘etiquette’ also started to be spread around that time. Being a quiet member of the audience was seen as one sign of etiquette. Appreciating the performance without making any noise during the performance, including the clapping sound, and observing the show without interfering with the performance were also known as parts of etiquette.\textsuperscript{108}

In other words, she thinks that the convention of being a quiet audience member

\textsuperscript{107} Choi, Jinah. Personal Interview. 6 Aug. 2008.

\textsuperscript{108} Choi, Jinah. Personal Interview. 6 Aug. 2008.
is imported from Western culture when Western style performances entered Korean culture. What she means by this is that in order to be looked at as a well-educated and culturally sophisticated, people started to follow this ‘etiquette’ fairly strictly, and it remains so until today. In addition to this, she also mentioned changes in the tendencies of Korean audience which are observed in contemporary Korean theatre scene.

As we know, in recent days, there are lots of novel attempts to build a new relationship between audiences and performers, but in Korea, it was a little bit risky to direct some pieces expecting audiences’ intimate involvements into the piece, up to a point. For example, it was not unusual to observe ‘quiet’ audiences in front of the performer who was asking them a question. In this way, Korean audiences are relatively passive compared to USA audiences. It might be my biased opinion, but I think that this may be one of the reasons which caused the differences between reactions of Korean audiences and the USA audiences.¹⁰⁹

Finally, differences between the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues* and the USA production of the same piece can be observed in terms of social acceptance of the piece. In other words, with regard to the matter of how *The Vagina Monologues* was accepted, interpreted, and understood in Korean society and in American society, Korean productions and the USA production reveal several differences. Regarding this, comparing the tones of Korean newspaper articles which dealt with this piece to those of

USA newspaper articles dealing with the same piece can be highly helpful, in order to observe the differences in social acceptance of this piece. In addition to this, scrutinizing the way mass media in each society dealt with this piece will be also useful.

In the case of the USA, it was not difficult to find several points of view to interpret this piece not only as a theatrical piece, but also as a social movement which deals with gender issues. In particular, after Eve Ensler started to get engaged in numerous activities with the establishment of V-Day, various scholars studied this work as a part of new forms of feminist movement. For example, Susan Bell and Susan Reverby analyzed the appropriateness of *The Vagina Monologues*’ methodology from a feminist perspective.

We are feminists in our 50s who first became activists in the women’s health movement when we were in our 20s. In 2002 *The Vagina Monologues* and participated in the 2002 V-Day College Campaign to end violence against women. We use our experiences “then” in the women’s health movement and “now” in the College Campaign as a lens through which to introduce a “worry” about “a culture of vagina” that the play’s author, Eve Ensler does not adequately address. Our focus is the differing ways that the body, and in particular that vagina, has been politicized in these two feminist eras. Our concern related to what we see as the unproblematized tension between a celebration of the pleasures of the body and the politics that underlie the play and the movement it has
In their writing, they not only approached this in terms of the possibility of this piece as an effective tool for the feminist movement, but they also illustrated how the discourse about women’s bodies has changed historically through the introduction of *The Vagina Monologues* and V-Day. Christine Cooper, like Bell and Reverby, also tried to understand this piece in the context of feminist history. By researching *The Vagina Monologues* – a worldwide phenomenon – she struggled to examine the potential political effects and the appropriateness of the monologue form in the feminist activism.

This essay examines the relationship between the mission of *The Vagina Monologues* and its aesthetic form. As a performance, the play varies with its context. But, despite its variations, because it is imbued with such purpose, the play sheds light on a particularly consumable form of feminism and activism……My critique is not (and cannot be) mere monologue either. It is the confluence of numerous exchanges that have already occurred – my encounters with the play; with the long tradition of feminism; with colleagues, editors, and reviewers – and it will, ideally, spur more.\(^\text{111}\)


However, in the case of Korea, it was fairly difficult to find a point of view treating this piece as a type of social movement and a theatrical performance at the same time. Except for a review article included in a feminist journal published by the same company that produced the first production of this piece, it was almost impossible to find an argument dealing with this piece from a feminist perspective or seeing it as a part of a social movement. In this way, while there appeared numerous attempts to approach this piece from a feminist perspective in the USA, in Korea, this piece was simply accepted as a popular theatrical performance. Examining the different tones of newspaper articles and their treatments of this piece allows us to observe this difference more clearly.

In the case of the USA, many newspaper articles dealt with this piece as a new way of social issue-making. Many public media outlets reported the audiences’ reactions to this piece in great detail, and commented on the original intention of the creator, Eve Ensler, in depth. For example, Anita Gates, a reporter for *The New York Times* said, “A lot of people seem to think she is the messiah heralding the second wave of feminism,” and Sarah Boxer explained Eve Ensler’s original intention in creating this piece with a particular emphasis on its background:

> Ms. Ensler, 44, said she began writing the play after a woman she knew started saying "really hideous, demeaning things about her vagina."

When Ms. Ensler discussed it with her friends, she was stunned. "Every

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woman I talked to opened up a can of worms." Soon she was traveling around the world interviewing women about their bodies, themselves. "It's the easiest thing I've ever done in my life," she said. "People long to talk about their vaginas. It's like a secret code between women."\(^{113}\)

In another instance, Liz Welch focused on explaining the social meaning of Eve Ensler's work:

Ms. Ensler clearly sees herself on a crusade to banish the shame some women feel about their bodies and sexuality, as well as to raise awareness about the effects of sexual abuse. If in interviews she talks of the show in terms that are reminiscent of 60's-era consciousness-raising, her view of performing also has a bit of the old Living Theater utopianism. "From the beginning, 'The Vagina Monologues' happened to me," she said in an interview. "If it were about me, I'd get nervous. It's about us."\(^{114}\)

In addition to this, there also were many newspaper articles, which introduced several points of view to interpreting this piece as part of a the feminist movement. They


supported their views by quoting experts’ opinions. In these articles, the introduction of the organization V-Day played an important role.

However, in the case of Korea, reporters usually focused on the person of the actor and her reputation as a performer. The biographies of Juhee Seo or Youngnam Jang were reported in detail, and the directors’ interpretations of this piece specifically accompanied these reports. In other words, while the USA reviews usually dealt with the social value and the meaning of this play in the socio-cultural context, the Korean reviews mostly dealt with its commercial value in relation to its popularity.

The question is what caused this difference, and what is caused by this difference. Regarding this, the fact that the original intentions of each production are different from each other can be mentioned as one of the major factors which served to generate this difference. That is to say, while the original purpose of Eve Ensler in performing this piece was to share her worries about the issue of the vagina and to break down a conventional viewpoint of female bodies, in the case of Korean productions, the original aim in presenting this piece was not exactly the same as Eve Ensler’s, except for the first production.

Since the first production of this piece in Korea was performed based on the translation of Sookreoyl Ryu, who was one of the editors for a feminist journal, planned and presented by Femiart, an organization for women artists in Korea, and directed by Hyaekyung Lee, who is a founder of Femiart, it seemed clear that the primary theme and concept of the first production was to bring Eve Ensler’s issues into Korea and introduce them in a Korean way, based on the context of feminism in Korea. Hyaekyung Lee made
this point obvious in several interviews with various mass media outlets. In an interview with a news reporter for *Maeil Business Newspaper*, she said, “What I want to deliver through the stories of several ‘personal’ ‘private’ experiences is ‘our’ ‘common’ stories as women. What Eve Ensler created is the stories, which need to be told.”

On the contrary, in the case of other Korean productions, it does not seem that sharing Eve Ensler’s ‘worries’ about the vagina or introducing her issues in Korea and in a Korean way was as significant as it was to the production team of the first Korean production of this piece, or to Eve Ensler. Roopina Oh, the assistant director for Jina Lee, who directed this piece for the second production presented in 2001 to 2006, confessed that one of the most difficult points that her production team had to face was adjusting the script to be not “too radical” or “too feminist.”

Jina Lee, who has directed this play several times since 2001, saw this work in England. She said that she was really impressed with this piece when she saw it in England. In particular, she was very surprised when she observed the enthusiastic reactions of the audience to the piece. Her experience of this script in England led her to stage this piece in Korea. However, she did not think that it could be possible to observe the same

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enthusiasm from the Korean audiences by simply translating this piece into Korean.\(^{116}\)

According to Oh, Lee focused on the fact that Western countries and the eastern countries have fairly different traditions concerning gender consciousness. According to Oh, Lee thought that if this work was presented just as it was in other Western countries, some audiences may be offended by it, because the tone of this piece is quiet direct, aggressive, and straightforward. This is why Lee was highly careful in adjusting this piece to have a better fit with Korean society, according to Oh:

Since Lee thought that Korean audiences were not as ready to deal with this issue in public, as audiences in Western countries were, she stepped back a little bit. However, I do not think that this means that our production team ignored the original intention of Eve Ensler. Rather, it was just having a somewhat different point of view in dealing with the matter of explaining Eve Ensler’s issues to the public in Korea in a Korean way. Our production team did not want to offend Korean audiences with too much radicalism. We did not want to break down all of the taboos about the female body through this piece. What we tried to do was just ‘start a conversation through this piece.’ Since the production reflected these concerns, it might have appeared that it minimized the

social meaning of Eve Ensler’s work, but I think that it was rather a strategic one step back for two steps forward in the future.\footnote{Oh, Roopina. Personal Interview. 8 Aug. 2008.}

Jinah Choi, who directed this piece in 2004, also confessed that she was confused about this issue – adjusting this piece ‘appropriately’ for Korean audience as other Korean directors did. She explains in the following what her position was regarding this matter, and why she had to choose that position:

When I was involved in this production in 2004, \textit{The Vagina Monologues} was already a well-known piece because of its great success from previous productions. The company, which produced this production again, did not want me to make a lot of changes in the piece. Thus, it is true that I did not have much of my own discretion in this piece as a director. When I first read the script, I remember that I could personally see lots of potential for this piece as an effective tool for a social movement. However, in the matter of how this piece was staged and how it was advertised to the public, it was just a popular theatre production. Personally, I found this very regretful. However, I could understand the position of the company that did not want to take a risk of transforming the piece into a social movement. In this context, it is still not easy for me to answer the question
whether the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues* was based on an appropriate adaptation or not.\textsuperscript{118}

One interesting point about this matter is that this question – how this piece can be interpreted not only as a theatrical piece, but also as a social movement, and how this concern can be presented on the stage – was also a concern of the production team of the first production of this piece as well. Since most cultural products imported from different cultures usually cannot avoid the process of adjustment and transformation to be ‘localized,’ it is not surprising that the production team of the first production had the same issue during the producing process. Ironically, the reason why the production team of the first production had difficulty with the adaptation was totally different from the reason why Jina Lee or other directors were in agony over this:

When we decided to stage this piece in the theatre, the biggest point of argument was how we can adapt this piece. Since many people involved in the first production already had a fairly deep background in feminist activism, we were truly inspired when we came to learn more about this piece. We had a long discussion about how we would be able to deliver not only the several stories included in the piece, but also Eve Ensler’s intention. We did not want this piece to be just sensational or popular.

\textsuperscript{118} Choi, Jinah. Personal Interview. 6 Aug. 2008.
What we wanted to do through this piece was to bring up the same issue in Korea.¹¹⁹

Sookryeol Ryu, the translator, was not only involved in the translation of the piece, but also in the process of the first production. This is because Ryu, as a feminist journalist, has developed a great relationship with Femiart, an organization for women artists in Korea which planned and presented this piece on the stage. As a person who first brought this piece to Korea as a translator, as a person who was deeply involved in the first production of this piece, and as an observer of the history of Korean *The Vagina Monologues*, she evaluated the Korean productions of this piece as follows:

The second production opened several months after the first one. When I saw Jina Lee’s work, I found it really interesting. While we – the first production team – presented this piece with three actors, what Jina Lee chose to do was to deliver all the monologues through only one actor. It was great. Many people seemed very impressed by the amazing acting ability of Juhee Seo. So was I. However, I have to say, in part, I was a bit regretful about what she did. This was because I could feel a kind of a phobia about dealing with the issue of sexuality or feminism during the performance.¹²⁰

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Regarding the impression that she got from the Jina Lee’s production, Ryu used a monologue about feminism as an example:

The overall atmosphere of that monologue was somewhat jeering or deriding. It could be my overreaction, but I could sense their fear of being labeled as feminists. I found that regretful. However, in terms of theatrical quality, it was great. While I was involved in the first production, another big issue for our production team was introducing this piece for the so-called ‘general public,’ who may be relatively more conservative than audiences of Western countries, as well as the matter of adapting it. I discovered that Jina Lee found a great point of negotiation between the viewpoints of the general public and those of feminist activists.\textsuperscript{121}

As Sookryeol Ryu argued, even though it is true that the social significance of this piece was slightly minimized when it was imported into Korea from the USA, this does not necessarily mean that \textit{The Vagina Monologues} had no effect in Korea. In Korea as well as in the USA, \textit{The Vagina Monologues} caused a great stir. While this effect, which could be called \textit{The Vagina Monologues} phenomena, was intentionally planned to be generated by the USA production team, in Korea, it was not a primary goal but rather a consequent result. What resulted from the Korean production and the USA production may have to be evaluated with different criteria; however, it is still difficult to deny that there clearly existed a type of \textit{The Vagina Monologues} effect in Korea as well. According

\textsuperscript{121} Ryu, Sookryeol. Personal Interview. 4 Aug. 2008.
to Roopina Oh, there are at least two obvious pieces of evidence which support this statement. First, eventually, audience members focused this issue to be a significant matter; second, *The Vagina Monologues* in Korea has developed from 2001 to 2006, gradually. Oh explains:

Since our production team had to consider the context of Korean society, we were careful in dealing with this issue. It is true that our team had our primary focus on making this piece more interesting, stylized, and popular, but it is also true that we kept the matter of how we can better deliver the message of the original creator of this piece, Eve Ensler, in our mind as well.\(^\text{122}\)

What Oh meant by this is that even though Jina Lee’s production of this script was not as radical or progressive as Eve Ensler’s work on the stage, it was still possible to observe some kind of ‘effect’ of this piece. Regarding this, Oh describes the post-performance discussions:

In 2004, we prepared something like a talk session after the show. It was the time that we allotted for the audiences to share their own stories about vaginas. Many people shared their impressions about the performances. It seemed many audiences found the piece highly touching as well as shocking. There were so many people who confessed

\(^{122}\text{Oh, Roopina. Personal Interview. 8 Aug. 2008.}\)
that they had never said the word ‘vagina’ out loud before they saw the show. We also heard several statements from many audience members declaring they would love their body, boji in particular, more than before during the talk session. I think that all of these ‘reactions’ mean something in Korean society, even though the audience was not as engaged as the USA audiences.\textsuperscript{123}

Oh also mentioned a poetry workshop, which was prepared by the 2006 production team as another example. She argued that the fact that there were numerous volunteers to participate in the poetry workshop event for writing a two line poem with the word ‘boji,’ a Korean translation of ‘vagina,’ was another example proving that the attitudes of Korean audiences about this play have changed as compared to the past:

In 2006, we prepared an event for the audience after the performances. It was a poetry workshop with the word ‘vagina.’ Actually, we did not expect that there would be so many participants in this event, but we were surprised, not only because there were so many people who wanted to take part in this event, but also because they were highly open-minded about this issue as compared to previous productions.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{123} Oh, Roopina. Personal Interview. 8 Aug. 2008.

\textsuperscript{124} Oh, Roopina. Personal Interview. 8 Aug. 2008.
In addition to that, Oh claimed that the reactions from the audiences were not the only part, which has changed from the past in the history of *The Vagina Monologues* in Korea. In Oh’s opinion, the productions have also evolved with the times:

In the 2006 production, a monologue called ‘angry vagina’ was presented for the first time in Korea. Before this production this monologue was not presented on Korean stage, because the production team thought that this monologue could be too radical for the Korean audience. However, after observing several Korean productions until 2005, we decided to include this monologue in the 2006 production. Even though there were some audience members who left the house during the performance, overall this monologue was favorably received. In addition to this, a monologue written by an audience member was also included in the 2006 production. I think that these kinds of changes reflect the changed attitude of Korean society regarding this issue.\(^{125}\)

As Roopina Oh argued, it is true that there was a certain kind of changes in the Korean productions of *The Vagina Monologues* from 2001 to 2006. In various ways, this piece was specifically adapted, and developed in an even more radical way. Together with what Roopina Oh pointed out, the fact that a monologue about a Bosnian refugee was replaced with a monologue about Korean comfort women, who were victimized by the

sex trade during World War II, also illustrates that the Korean production of this piece gradually evolved and adjusted itself during this time.

However, there is another question: why has the title of Korean productions remained in its English original until the very last production? Why, while every single word in the monologues that were included in this piece was translated into Korean, was the title of this piece not translated into Korean? It is slightly ironic to leave the title of this play in a foreign language even though its theme is ‘the power of speaking out about what we could not speak out about before.’

Sookryeol Ryu explained the reason why she decided to publish this book under its English title, and not with its Korean translation:

We used the term ‘boji’ [the Korean word for ‘vagina’] on the stage during the performance instead of the English word ‘vagina.’ We thought that we had to, in order to deliver the original intention of Eve Ensler in creating this piece more effectively and more powerfully. So we did. However, we could not publish this book under the Korean title—not that we didn’t want to, but because we couldn’t.

According to Ryu, the reason why they decided to leave the title for this piece in English was not their decision based on their own choice, but a choice imposed by the Korean censorship system which is directly related to the law.

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The Korean Public Performance and Ethics Committee is a representative council which has the absolute final word. Almost every cultural product created in Korea needs to be approved by this organization in order to be performed, broadcast, or published. According to The Korean Public Performance and Ethics Committee, the word ‘boji’ is slang, and any kind of cultural product, which has slang in its title, cannot be displayed in a public library. This was a huge dilemma to us: because we focused on its educational effect, we wanted this piece to be in public libraries. At the same time, we also wanted to resist their definition and categorization based on the word ‘boji’ by publishing the book with a Korean title. The decision that we made was to publish it with an English title and perform it in Korean. By doing this, we could have this piece be in public libraries while ‘speaking out’ about that ‘slang,’ at the same time. How the Korean Public Performance and Ethics Committee thinks about vagina clearly shows the reason why there should be a piece like The Vagina Monologues, I think.128

According to Sookryeol Ryu, Jinah Choi, and Roopina Oh, the Korean The Vagina Monologues was obviously different from the USA production of the same piece in terms of social acceptance, as well as in terms of design and in the matter of the audiences’ involvement. To sum up, while the Korean production took advantage of sophisticated scenic, costume and light design in order to have this piece to be more

theatrically performative, highly aesthetical, popularly favorable, and most of all commercially successful, the USA production took advantage of the power of the text by having a minimized set design on the stage and delivering it directly. As a result, the USA production of *The Vagina Monologues* was accepted not only as a theatrical performance but also as a new type of social movement related to the gender issue, and supported by numerous audiences very actively and consistently, while the Korean production was simply accepted as a well-made theatrical performance.

In discussing what caused these differences between the Korean production and the USA production, it is difficult to find the one factor which would be considered the most significant reason. This is because these differences between the two productions are caused by a combination of numerous factors, such as different theatrical conventions between two countries, the different atmosphere of each country’s theatre scene, the different features of audiences of each country, and most of all, the different socio-cultural contexts between where the piece was first created and where it was adapted. Thus, a more important question than asking what caused these differences between the Korean production and the USA production would be how we can interpret these differences in an era of globalization.
CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION

In the field of theatre studies, the matter of translation is not a new research topic. For example, the question of how we can translate or adapt Greek tragedies appropriately has been discussed for a long time, and much research about Shakespeare’s work also includes the matter of translation. However, in the contemporary world, the matter of translation and adaptation has started to be researched in a novel way. This is because it is now more obvious than ever that translation is not only about switching from one language to another but also about delivering cultural products, and with them an entire historical, sociological, and cultural background, from one country to another or from one society to another. This is why so many scholars in theatre studies still ask “Why translation matters.”

So why does translation matter? First of all, it matters because we are no longer living in the world where the east and the west never meet. Based on highly developed communication and transportation technology, the east and west are meeting each other every day and at every moment in today’s world. As the concept of the ‘global village’ implies, globalization has made this whole world a town. Now, there are no more places

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which can remain unaffected by international influences. Politically, economically, sociologically, and culturally, every society affects others, and translation is at the center of this powerful flow of information. This is because every cultural exchange is basically a matter of translation. Thus, translation does indeed matter.

Ultimately, what I wanted to examine through the case of *The Vagina Monologues* was also the matter of translation. I wanted to investigate how the process of translation affected the adapted production, beyond the matter of language. I selected this piece as my primary case study on the basis of the following three reasons. First, this piece deals with issues of gender and sexuality, which are some of the most important issues in current society. Second, this piece is recognized not only as a theatrical artwork, but also as a social movement. And, third, this piece already has been translated into more than 45 different languages and performed in 119 countries.

In order to conduct a comparative study between the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues* and the original USA production, I not only tried to collect numerous articles and reviews about this piece, both from Korea and from the USA, but also attempted to obtain oral histories with several Korean artists who are involved in the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues*. As a result, I collected more than 70 reviews and articles, and a similar amount of resources from the USA. In addition to this, I also arranged personal interviews with Sookryeol Ryu, who translated this piece into Korean in 2001, Jinah Choi, who directed this piece in 2004, and Roopina Oh, who worked as an assistant director with Jina Lee, who directed this piece in 2001, 2002, and 2006.
In the process of analyzing this material, I discovered at least three obvious differences between the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues* and the USA production. The first difference between the Korean production and the USA production was in terms of design. The second point of difference was found in the audiences’ reactions and involvement. And the third difference between the two productions was observed in the matter of how each society accepted this piece.

In terms of design, the Korean productions tend to have more elaborate design compared to the USA production. As a possible explanation for this, I pointed out the different theatrical conventions of each country. Specifically, in the case of the USA, it is not necessarily required for productions to have a fully designed stage to engage their audiences; in the USA context, the stage for *The Vagina Monologues* was designed to be un-designed. In the case of Korea, to have a fully designed set for production is more usual. This is because, unlike American audiences, Korean audiences tend to react better to spectacular visual displays or by a presentation on the stage, as compared to a text-based performance. This may be the reason why stage performances such as stand-up comedy, whose major tool for amusing their audiences is text, are not as popular in Korea as they are in the USA.

Another difference between the Korean and the USA productions is the issue of audiences’ reactions and involvement. In the case of the USA, there were many audience members who not only enthusiastically liked this piece, but also consistently supported it. As a result, Eve Ensler could establish a nonprofit organization for stopping all violence against women and girls, called V-Day. V-Day, which started with a 2,500-seat, sold-out
benefit performance of *The Vagina Monologues* on February 14, 1998, is now a global movement whose activities are highly influential throughout the world. However, there was no such activity based on the popularity of *The Vagina Monologues* in Korea. The reason for this is deeply linked to the final difference observed between the two productions.

This final difference is in how Korean society and the USA society accepted this piece, which can be linked to the issue of translation. While American society, especially New Yorkers accepted it not only as a theatrical performance but also as a new type of social movement, it was barely possible to observe such a viewpoint in Korean society. In most cases, this piece was simply accepted as a popular and cutting-edge theatre performance in Korea, while the USA found this piece to be a new type of feminist activity, since it deals with gender and sexuality issues as its theme. Accordingly, in the tone of newspaper articles and reviews about this piece, as well as in how the mass media dealt with this piece, the productions displayed numerous differences. For example, while many newspapers in the USA dealt with this piece as a new way of raising social awareness through their articles, by reporting the audiences’ reactions to this piece in great detail and often explaining Eve Ensler’s original intentions, many Korean newspapers focused instead on the person of the actor and her reputation as a performer.

One possible explanation for this is the fact that these two productions were produced and presented under different conditions. In the case of the USA production, since it was created reflecting the American socio-cultural context and presented with the purpose of delivering this context, it could arouse remarkable sympathy from a great
number of American audiences, whose reaction and involvement continued to evolve into significant social movements such as the establishment of V-Day. However, the Korean production was presented based on an imported script with the different purpose of achieving a great commercial success.

Even though only these three differences between the productions were discussed in this paper, it is true that there are numerous other differences between the Korean production and the USA production. When we recall the fact that every theatre production, as a form of artwork, necessarily has its own theme and concept of stylization, it is not surprising for us to discover several differences from one production to another. However, to discover specific points of difference between productions and to try to figure out what brought these differences about is still important. This is because comparative studies such as this one allow us to have a better understanding of cultural translation in the era of globalization.

In the process of collecting sources for this research, I found two works particularly interesting. One was a journal article written by Sea Ling Cheng, an anthropologist whose research is in the issues of sexuality, prostitution, migration, trafficking, and human rights; the second was an article written by Ari Gangkim and printed in a Korean daily newspaper, Hankyoreh Shinmun. Sea Ling Cheng introduced the case of the Hong Kong production of The Vagina Monologues in her article, and Ari Gangkim reported about the Chinese production of the same piece.


Sea Ling Cheng starts her argument by sharing her impressions and appreciation of *The Vagina Monologue*. She said that since there was not “Any feminist discussion about sexual pleasure and desire, *The Vagina Monologues* was [her] first experience of such intense engagement with women’s bodies and sexuality.”\(^\text{132}\) However, she also found that the stories of *The Vagina Monologues* cannot represent every woman’s experiences about her vagina. Regarding this she makes the following claim:

It is intriguing to consider how the ‘vagina experiences’ of 200 mostly American women might speak to women as diverse in origins as a Masai Village in Kenya, Paris and Beijing, as the V-Day website proclaims. In *The Vagina Monologues* and V-Day, the anatomical female body – encapsulated in the vagina – is proclaimed as the universal site for women’s solidarity regardless of class, ethnicity and religion. As such, the diverse experiences of women become essentialized. But critiques of the Western model of sisterhood have urged us to attend to the importance of location (Mohanty et al 1991; Grewal and Kaplan 1994.) If bodies and sexualities are socially constructed, there must also be significant differences between the experiences of American women and, as is the case here, their counterparts in Hong Kong, given the very different political, social and economic contexts.\(^\text{133}\)

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\(^{133}\) Sea Ling Cheng. “Vagina dialogues?: Critical reflections from Hong Kong on *The Vagina
This illumination led her to create Hong Kong’s own *Vagina Monologues*. Between August 2002 and January 2003 she interviewed twenty women in Hong Kong between the ages of 17 and 70 who were informed that the interviews would be used in the production of a play about women’s bodies, intimate relationships and sexuality, and also reviewed academic research on these subjects. In this way, she collected several stories about women’s experiences related to their own bodies, reflecting Hong Kong’s unique political, social and economic contexts, and these stories turned into a theatre production entitled “*Stories of Our Little Sisters.*”

What Sea Ling Cheng tried to do in order to adapt *The Vagina Monologues* in an appropriate way for Hong Kong society reminds me of the case of Korea and the interviews that I conducted with Korean artists involved with the Korean production. This is because the question of how this piece can be significantly adapted mattered not only to Sea King Cheng, but also to some Korean artists who were involved in the production of Korean the play.

Sookryeol Ryu, the Korean translator confessed that one of the most difficult points that she had to deal with while she was trying to translate this piece into Korean was the matter of how she could deliver the theme of the piece in a Korean way, one that fit with Korean society.134 Jinah Choi, who directed *The Vagina Monologues* in Korea in 2004, has also confessed that the greatest difficulty that she had in re-directing this piece was the matter of adaptation.135 Roopina Oh, who worked as an assistant director for Jina

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Lee, who directed this piece in 2001, 2002, and 2006, similarly revealed that the biggest problem in staging this piece in Korea was the matter of adjusting it to Korean society.\footnote{Oh, Roopina. Personal Interview. 8 Aug. 2008.}

In order for this piece to have a better fit with Korean society, Sookryeol Ryu left the title of this piece in English, Jinah Choi developed its design in a more elaborate way, and Jina Lee with Roopina Oh thought about replacing the story of the Bosnian refugee with the story of Korean women victimized by the sex trade during World War II. Even though their choices for adapting this piece were all different from one another, in the respect that all of them found the issue of adaptation significant, it can be said that they held much in common.

While the journal article written by Sea Ling Cheng gives us an example of a more active cultural translation than what happened in Korea, Gangkim Ari reports on what I consider a passive reaction to a cultural translation.

AFP reported that the government of China prevented the opening of a famous feminist play, *The Vagina Monologues* which was planning to open in Beijing. According to AFP, a spokesperson of the theatre where *The Vagina Monologues* was scheduled to open said that “The opening date for this show is tentatively postponed, and the new opening date is not decided yet.” The person representing the Shanghai Theatre Center
said that “Since this play is not appropriate for Chinese society, its opening has been cancelled.”

According to Gangkim Ari, who reported this news, several non-government organizations that planned to open this piece in China had to compensate all the people for their tickets. This incident in China again lets us think about the matter of translation. Tomaz Onič argued that “Transferring a text from one culture space to another raises the question whether certain cases allow it at all.” He pointed out this fact to explain that when translation happens, there exist not only linguistic barriers but also cultural barriers. The reason why *The Vagina Monologues* could not open in Beijing, even though every single word in the piece could be translated into Chinese, is related to this idea.

It is not very long ago that arguments about translation started to deal with the context of culture as well as the matter of linguistics. As cultural exchanges are becoming more and more widespread in the contemporary world, we now face the question of how we can deal with the cultural references on which these cultural creations are based. If an appropriate approach to this issue is not accomplished, a great many things will be lost in the process of translation. This is why translation matters, especially in the era of globalization.

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I conclude with the following question: is a translated cultural product just a supplementary creation derived from the original work or is it meant to be accepted as another original work based on the original work as Mazid claimed – “Translation is not in fact a translation, but the ‘original.’”?\(^\text{139}\)

This seems a very simple question, however, it is never easy to answer it. This is because, the discussion about translation is not usually limited to the matter of exchanging one language for another, but also includes the matter of reflecting and delivering the contexts of where the original work is first created.

Moreover, it is also true that there is a tendency of the ever-accelerating globalization to complicate the matter further. For example, as we can see in the argument of Mary Snell-Hornby, “All these current developments concerning international communication and the role of cultures and languages in this respect have also deeply affected translation and the work of professional translator.”\(^\text{140}\)

Even though my position is far away from a professional translator’s, this research allowed me to be sympathetic with the translators in a predicament in some


\(^{140}\) Schaffner, Christina ed. Translation In the Global Village, UK; Great Britain by Short Run Press Ltd., 2000: 6.
ways. This was because I had to translate all resources collected from Korea, written or spoken in Korean into English. In the process of translating the sources, I had to keep in mind what Loren Kruger said about theatre translation while recalling the situations that the Korean production team of *The Vagina Monologues* seemed to have struggled with:

Theatre translation must negotiate a critical tension, we might also say "drama," between competing paradigms, but this tension is best described not, as it often is, as a contest between "faithful" and "free" or between proper translation and improper adaptation. Rather, theatre translators must negotiate the contest between two imperatives, both legitimate: between effacing the work of translation in the interest of immediate communication with the local audience, and disclosing that work so as to communicate the challenge to communication posed by differences in language and culture.\(^{141}\)

Indeed, translation work might be called a negotiation: Negotiation between different languages, negotiation between different cultures, negotiation between different belief systems, and most of all negotiation between different ways of understanding. And thinking about Kruger’s quote above, this negotiation is acceptably legitimate.

This may be linked to the reason why I found the difference between the Korean

production of *The Vagina Monologues* and the USA production of the same piece as
dissimilarities between two different worlds rather than differences between two
individual theatre productions.

To deal with the issue of distance between worlds, *The Vagina Monologues* is
just a single case study, which is only a small part of this issue. Thus, it is clear that the
limitations of this paper are many. However, I would be really glad if this case study of
*The Vagina Monologue* can contribute to the discussion about the problems of
translation in the era of globalization.
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PRODUCTION RELATED MATERIALS


PERSONAL INTERVIEWS


Appendix A:
The History of Korean *The Vagina Monologues* from 2001 to 2008
# Appendix A:
The History of Korean *The Vagina Monologues* from 2001 to 2008

<table>
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<th>Title</th>
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<th>Close</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<td>16 Nov. 2001</td>
<td>13 Jan. 2002</td>
<td>Cult Hall at Daehakroh, Heywhadong, Seoul</td>
<td>Jina Lee</td>
<td>Wai Kit Tang, Juhee Seo</td>
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<td>Juhee Seo’s Vagina Monologues</td>
<td>11 Apr. 2002</td>
<td>19 May 2002</td>
<td>Cecil Theatre at Gwanghwamoon, Sejongroh, Seoul</td>
<td>Jina Lee</td>
<td>Juhee Seo</td>
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<td>Juhee Seo’s Vagina Monologues</td>
<td>15 Sep. 2006</td>
<td>12 Nov. 2006</td>
<td>Dure Hall at Daehakroh, Heywhadong, Seoul</td>
<td>Jina Lee</td>
<td>Yongnam Jang</td>
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<td>The Vagina Monologues</td>
<td>08 Mar. 2007</td>
<td>08 Jun. 2007</td>
<td>Pohang</td>
<td>Eunha</td>
<td>Jihee Ha</td>
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<td>The Vagina Monologues in Modern Dance</td>
<td>02 Jul. 2007</td>
<td>02 Jul. 2007</td>
<td>Daegu Art Center Daegu</td>
<td>Jina Lee</td>
<td>J.O.K, Kyoungsun Kim, Soomin Park, Junekyou Park</td>
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Figure 1. The History of Korean *The Vagina Monologues* from 2001 to 2008
Appendix B:
Personal Interview with Sookryeol Ryu, the Korean translator of *The Vagina Monologues*
Appendix B:

Personal Interview with Sookryeol Ryu, the Korean translator of *The Vagina Monologues*

When 4 Aug. 2008
Where Heywhadong, Seoul, South Korea
Interviewer Jirye Lee
Interviewee Sookryeol Ryu, the Korean translator of *The Vagina Monologues*

Q 1. Can you tell me how you felt when you first found this piece?
A 1. It was late 90s when I came to know this piece for the first time. At that time, I was working as a reporter for the International Department for *The Munhwa Ilbo*. One day, I read a *The New York Times* article about *The Vagina Monologues*. This piece was being introduced by Gloria Steinem. I read the article with interest, and found that piece fascinating. I thought that this piece could be a very good starting point to talk about the female body issue in Korean society, which has a very conservative mindset about the sexuality and gender issues. So, I called Hyunkyung Chung, who is a theologian at The Union Theological Seminary in New York. I asked her to send me the script of this work, and started to translate this into Korean. The original purpose of the translation was staging rather than publishing.
Q 2. However, according to the record, this work was published first, and performed later. It seems that it took some time for this piece to be performed after it was published. Was there any specific reason?

A 2. Actually, there was no specific reason. It was simply because Femiart was running so many projects at that time. For example, Women International Film Festival was going on at that time under the auspices of Femiart for this practical reason, the schedule for its publication and planning became a bit different from what we originally planned.

Q 3. Can you tell me about the first production of *The Vagina Monologues* in Korea?

A 3. The Korea Premiere for this piece was in 2001. There were three actors in it. They were Jisook Kim, Jiwon Ye, and Kyoungmi Lee. Performing as Eve Ensler, Jisook Kim interviewed the others, and Ye and Lee answered her questions in a sequential order. This production was planned and presented by Femiart. Later in that same year, Jina Lee re-directed this piece. Lee dramatized this piece as a monodrama just like Eve Ensler did. For this second production, Juhee Seo performed it.

Q 4. Do you think that the Korean audience was ready for this piece?

A 4. I remember that I was surprised because the Korean audience was far more prepared than the production team expected. During the first production, I went to the theatre as much as I could. I found that there were several celebrities who
went there to see this work. I thought that that showed how seriously this piece appealed to the public.

Q 5. How did the audience like the Korea Premiere?
A 5. Actually, I expected that it would be somewhat sad, because this piece included several monologues which are not upbeat. However, there were so many audience members who found this piece to be cheerful. From that, I concluded that the Korean audience has changed a lot. I also remember that I was surprised because there were several older men in the audience.

Q 6. What do you think brought older male audience to the theatre? What were they expecting?
A 6. I guess that they came because they knew what this piece was about. Since they were interested in this piece, they came to the theatre. I think that there could have been some people who expected ‘something else,’ of course. However, I found that was a reflection of a healthy desire.

Q 7. Can you tell me how you liked the second production of this piece?
A 7. The second production opened several months after the first one. When I saw Jina Lee’s work, I found it really interesting. While we (the first production team) presented this piece with three actors, what Jina Lee chose to do was to deliver
all the monologues through only one actor. It was great. Many people seemed very impressed by the amazing acting ability of Juhee Seo. So was I. However, I have to say, in part, I was a bit regretful about what she did. This was because I could feel a kind of a phobia about dealing with the issue of sexuality or feminism during the performance. For example, there was a monologue about feminism. The overall atmosphere of that monologue was somewhat jeering or deriding. It could be my overreaction, but I could sense their fear of being labeled as feminists. I found that regretful. As well as to this, I found the way it was directed was too asexual, and I did not like that. However, in terms of theatrical quality, it was great. While I was involved in the first production, another big issue for our production team was introducing this piece for the so-called ‘general public,’ who may be relatively more conservative than audiences of Western countries, as well as the matter of adapting it. I discovered that Jina Lee found a great point of negotiation between the viewpoints of the general public and those of feminist activists.

Q 8. Compared to the USA production, the Korean production did not bring about audience’s serious involvement. It is true that many Korean productions were successfully performed, but it is also true that there was not such a consistent support from the audience for this piece, unlike the case of the USA. What do you think made this difference?

A 8. If someone asks me what I think the factors, which caused a huge reaction to The
Vagina Monologues of the USA audiences were, I would answer that it must be the power of truth. As you know, Eve Ensler, the creator of this piece, interviewed more than two hundred women in order to create this piece. By herself. Many of the monologues in this piece are based on true stories. And all of them were transformed, reworked, and presented by the same person, the original source collector who can deliver the intention of the piece best. I think that this fact – that the piece was performed by the original creator who collected numerous ‘true stories’ by interviewing more than two hundred women with incredible enthusiasm about this issue in order to create the piece - maximized its power. How could it be more powerful than this? I think that it must have worked as one of the important factors, which contributed to evoke the audiences’ sympathy to this piece, in a very significant way. However, in the case of Korean productions, the situation was quite different.

Most of all, the piece needed to be translated into Korean. Of course, I, as a translator of this piece into Korean, did my best not to lose any significant meanings of some words, contexts, and situations in the process of translating, but how could this be possible unless this piece were originally written in Korean? Second, this play was performed by someone who is not the original creator of this piece. Throughout the rehearsal process, we did our best to have the actors understood the original intention of Eve Ensler, but it was very difficult. For example, we had quite a hard time casting some actors for the first production of the piece. This was because there were several actors who refused
our requests to be involved in the show. Not all of them, but some of them clearly revealed the reasons for their refusals to our request. They said that they did not want to be branded feminists. While Eve Ensler delivered her texts from the bottom of her heart and with a sense of duty, Korean actors ‘acted’ it. How could they arouse same reactions from their own audiences?

Q 9. *The Vagina Monologues* is well known as a play whose theme is the power of speaking out about what we could not speak out about before. However, even though its core theme is speaking out, the title or this play was not translated into Korean. Do you not think that this is ironic?

A 9. We used the term ‘boji’ [the Korean word for ‘vagina’] on the stage during the performance instead of the English word ‘vagina.’ We thought that we had to, in order to deliver the original intention of Eve Ensler in creating this piece more effectively and more powerfully. So we did. However, we could not publish this book under the Korean title—not that we did not want to, but because we could not.

Basically, it was because of the law. The Korean Public Performance and Ethics Committee is a representative council which has the absolute final word. Almost every cultural product created in Korea needs to be approved by this organization in order to be performed, broadcast, or published. According to The Korean Public Performance and Ethics Committee, the word ‘boji’ is slang, and any kind
of cultural product, which has slang in its title, cannot be displayed in a public library.

This was a huge dilemma to us: because we focused on its educational effect, we wanted this piece to be in public libraries. At the same time, we also wanted to resist their definition and categorization based on the word ‘boji’ by publishing the book with a Korean title. The decision that we made was to publish it with an English title and perform it in Korean. By doing this, we could have this piece be in public libraries while ‘speaking out’ about that ‘slang,’ at the same time. How the Korean Public Performance and Ethics Committee thinks about *vagina* clearly shows the reason why there should be a piece like *The Vagina Monologues*, I think.

Q 10. You picked the word ‘boji’ for the Korean translation of ‘vagina.’ What made you choose this word?

A 10. As there are so many different words to indicate vagina in English, there are also many Korean words indicating vagina. I wanted to find the most natural word from among those. Unsurprisingly, the word ‘boji’ popped up in my mind, and I thought that ‘boji’ could be a really appropriate translation for the word ‘vagina.’ It was because I found this word not too descriptive, too medical or too scientific. I also wanted to find a word indicating the entire female genital part. I thought that the word ‘boji’ is usually used in that way. That was why I chose the word ‘boji.’
Q 11. I also would like to know if there were any significant difficulties that you had to face while you were translating this piece.

Q 11. Actually, there were no specific difficulties that I had to face while I was translating this piece into Korean. I found that translating this piece was a really enjoyable work for me. After I finished it, I got lots of compliments from others on what I did. Maybe it was because I could fully agree with Eve Ensler’s intention in creating this piece. So, there was nothing that I found difficult to understand. It was really interesting work. If I were a man, it might have been a lot harder.

Q 12. As a translator, how did you expect the readers would accept this piece? Were there any concerns about introducing this piece in Korean society?

A 12. Not particularly. As you know, this piece was written based on various interviews with a variety of women of different ages, ethnicities, nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and so on. It includes experiences of women from all over the world, not only from the USA. I thought that this piece has a universal message, which could be easily shared regardless of readers’ age, ethnicity, nationality, cultural background and so on. Thus, I was just happy that I had the chance to translate this piece into Korean, but was not worried about it. However, there was a difficult point when we tried to stage this piece. When we decided to stage this piece in the theatre, the biggest point of argument was how we can adapt this piece. Since many people involved in the first
production already had a fairly deep background in feminist activism, we were truly inspired when we came to learn more about this piece. We had a long discussion about how we would be able to deliver not only the several stories included in the piece, but also Eve Ensler’s intention. We did not want this piece to be just sensational or popular. What we wanted to do through this piece was to bring up the same issue in Korea.

Q 13. I found how Korean mass media introduced this piece to the public very interesting. This was because, according to the article, it seemed that the reporters understood and agreed with the main theme and concept of this play, but it was really hard to observe cases of mass media using the term ‘boji’ in their articles. Instead of using the term ‘boji,’ they used the inscription ‘XX’ for vagina. I would like you to describe how you felt about this.

A 13. In any case, it would be not easy to use the term ‘boji’ in public, no matter what the reasons are. It requires certain courage. In the case of mass media, it requires not only courage on the reporter’s part, but also on the part of the news press company as well.

As far as I remember, there was only one review which was published in one of the major Korean daily newspapers, which used the term ‘boji.’ Ari Jung, a news reporter for Hankyoreh Shinmun used the word ‘boji’ in her article. Since I know there is a strict taboo on using the word ‘boji’ in Korea, I thought what she did was really brave and impressive. I personally thanked her for what she did. This
is because I thought that what she did could be a first step in breaking the old taboos on the word ‘vagina’ in Korean society.

Q 14. In the case of the USA, *The Vagina Monologues* was not only accepted as a theatrical piece, but also as a social movement, which succeeded in arousing many people’s sympathy. For example, there were several journal articles dealing with this piece from the feminist perspective, and V-day, a nonprofit organization for women, was established in a strong connection with the success of this piece. However, it was really hard to observe the same kind of reaction or involvement to this piece in Korea. I wonder if you think the Korean production of this piece delivered the original intention of Eve Ensler properly.

A 14. In terms of feminism, Korean society cannot be told that it is still before the 21st century. What I mean by this is that when it comes to feminism, there exist 18th century’s critical mind, 19th century’s atmosphere, and 20th century-style discussion at the same time in Korean society. Even though it is true that feminist studies are pretty well accepted in Korea, it is equally true that they are too serious, stiff, and rigid.

While many Western countries have developed their discussion about feminism in various ways, in Korea, feminist studies have been limited to campaigns to save women victims such as battered wives, victims of sexual violence, and female workers whose rights as worker were not fully guaranteed for a long time. So, feminist studies in Korea tended to be too moralistic, scholarly, and earnest.
However, from the feminist point of view, what *The Vagina Monologues* is based on is totally different from the version of feminism that is at the core of Korean feminism. Since *The Vagina Monologues* argues, in part, for admitting the desire of women, there was certain distance between the mainstream Korean feminism and Eve Ensler’s argument, as expressed in her work. I think that this was one of the reasons, which blocked the possibility of *The Vagina Monologues* evolving into a social movement beyond the stage in Korean society.

I think that the discussion of feminism should be just a half-step ahead in a society, not ten steps ahead, in order to be persuasive for the people of that society. Eve Ensler’s discussion might have been a bit more advanced than it was supposed to be for the Korean society.
Appendix C:

Personal Interview with Jinah Choi, the director of *The Vagina Monologues* (2004)
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Personal Interview with Jinah Choi, the director of *The Vagina Monologues* (2004)

When 6 Aug. 2008
Where Heywhadong, Seoul, South Korea
Interviewer Jirye Lee
Interviewee Jinah Choi, the director of the Korean *The Vagina Monologues* (2004)

Q 1. What led you to direct *The Vagina Monologues*?
A 1. It was 2004 when I was involved with *The Vagina Monologues* as a director. Since this play has already been performed several times before 2004, and most productions were quite successful, this piece was already well-known to the public by that time. As I was interested in this piece personally, I said yes with pleasure when I was asked to be a director for this piece.

Q 2. Have you ever seen this play before you became involved as a director? If you have, when did you see it, and who was the director for that production? I also want to know how you liked it.
A 2. As far as I remember, I saw both the first production of this piece directed by Hyaekyung Lee and the second production directed by Jina Lee in 2001. I found
both of them very interesting.

It was interesting because they were the stories of women told by women, and it was fascinating because the stories were being told through the form of a monologue not through the form of lecture, drama, or dialogue. In the case of the second production, Jina Lee directed this piece as a mono drama, as opposed to the first production, which had three actors in it. I found that transformation fascinating.

In the matter of how we can interpret this play, I rated the first production more highly compared to the second production, because I personally agreed with the theme and the concept of Femiart, but, in the matter delivering the message to the public more effectively, the second production directed by Jina Lee seemed somewhat better.

Especially, it seemed that the transformation from three actors’ play to a monodrama allowed the audience to be absorbed in this piece more easily. Plus, the live piano pieces inserted between the monologues not only allowed each monologue to be connected to other monologues more smoothly by working as an appropriate bridge, but also let the audience feel stronger sympathy for the play by adding more lyricism into the play, which does not have a clear structure of development and conclusion.

Q 3. As a director, how did you want this piece to be seen?

A 3. To answer in one sentence, I wanted this piece to look as ‘a play that one wants
to show to one’s boyfriend.’ Even though the theme of this play can be somewhat serious or even grave, I wanted this play to have a free and light atmosphere open to everyone’s participation. However, I did not want this piece to be loved by ‘suit brigade.’

Q 4. What was the most significant point upon which you focused your strength in order for this piece to be directed as you just said?

A 4. Before I answer this question, there is one thing that I want to say. It is a back story about how I got involved in this production. In the case of this production, the process of managing a production team was a bit unusual, because by that time I got involved in the production team of this play, the cast member, Juhee Seo, was already selected.

Usually, when the decision about the staging of certain productions is finalized, first, members of the production team are recruited, and then cast members are recruited. However, in the case of this production, Juhee Seo was cast as an actor for this play before I was hired as a director. That is to say, I was hired for the Juhee Seo’s *Vagina Monologues*. While Juhee Seo already had previous experiences with this piece, and was successful several times, I was ‘new’ to this piece as a director. The company who presented this production did not want me to direct this piece too differently from the previous productions, which were very successful, so I only had limited discretionary power only as a director. As a result, what I did as a director was just preserving and refining what Jina Lee had
done, so, I do not think that I really directed this piece wholly. Therefore, it is
true that I was the director for the 2004 *Vagina Monologues*, officially, but, I
want you to know that I am participating in this interview as a person who once
had a deep relation with the Korean *The Vagina Monologues*, rather than a
director.

Now, to answer to this question, the point that I concentrate on most as a director
for the show was the matter what the most effective way to deliver the powerful
message of this piece’s lines to the audience from the stage. According to the way
how this piece was written, it seems that the essential part of this piece is its lines.
I found that the lines in this piece are very powerful and strong. What I put my
greatest effort on was to have those lines not to lose any power of those, and the
meaning of those lines to be delivered to the audience.

Q 5. I interviewed Sookryeol Ryu who translated this piece into Korean. I asked her
what she disliked the most when she saw the second production of this piece
directed by Jina Lee. She said that “I found the way it was directed was too
asexual, and I did not like that.” She said that while the original piece written and
performed by Eve Ensler is very sexually lively, animating, and full of fire, the
production directed by Jina Lee seemed a little bit too serious, earnest, and grave.
What do you think about this?

A 5. I think that this question can be linked to the question of whether the Korean
audience was truly ready for this piece or not. *The Vagina Monologue* is a play,
which encourages talking about the issue of female bodies by pointing out that discourses about female bodies are usually conducted from male point of view. However, after the intention of the creator and the background story about how it was created became well-known to the public, it is true that there still were some people who came to the theatre expecting ‘something else’ from its title. When we recall this fact, I wonder if it could have been really appropriate to direct this piece a bit more provocatively sexually in order for this piece to have more punch in it. Considering the audience’s level, I think that it was sexual enough. Is that the important thing to create the mood for everybody to talk about this issue with interest, without being offended, and at an appropriate level? Since I wanted this piece to be a play which can be elicit sympathy from everyone, rather than a party for some special radical women, I can understand if the translator was not be satisfied with the piece directed by Jina Lee. In my opinion, it seems impossible not to have any differences in understanding this piece, because the translator and I have different viewpoints.

Q 6. It is true that Eve Ensler has a great reputation as a playwright and a poet, but it is equally true that she is also well known as a feminist activist. In many cases, she introduces herself to others as a feminist. Under this condition, how can we understand the fact that once there was a monologue deriding feminists in Korean production of this piece?
When I was involved in this production in 2004, *The Vagina Monologues* was already a well-known piece because of its great success from previous productions. The company, which produced this production again, did not want me to make a lot of changes in the piece. So, even though I was a director for this piece, I could not have the absolute right to direct this piece as I wanted to. In this manner, it can be more correct to call the production directed by me a type of extended production from the previous production. Thus, it is true that I did not have much of my own discretion in this piece as a director. What I want to say by this is that there were many things that I wanted to try but could not.

For example, when I first read the script, I remember that I could personally see lots of potential for this piece as an effective tool for a social movement. However, in the matter of how this piece was staged and how it was advertised to the public, it was just a popular theatre production. Personally, I found this very regretful. However, I could understand the position of the company that did not want to take a risk of transforming the piece into a social movement. In this context, it is still not easy for me to answer the question whether the Korean production of *The Vagina Monologues* was based on an appropriate adaptation or not.

The monologue which can be seen as a monologue deriding feminists was already included in the script before I got involved in this production, and actually there was nothing that I could do about it. Personally, I did not like that monologue. However, I also did not want this piece to be too educational in
terms of feminism. In the case of the Korean production of this piece, obviously it was planned as a commercial play produced under a commercial production system and not as a social movement.

However, this does not necessarily mean that there was no possibility for this piece to be interpreted as a social movement. For example, there were several times when special shows were planned by and with feminist organizations, and there also were events for the audience members in order to offer them a chance to talk about the impressions that they got from the shows.

One thing that was tantalizing was that these events were not developed over just talking in many cases. I think that the matter of how we can have this piece not only as a theatrical piece but also as a social movement can be discussed only when it is discussed not only from the point of view of production team but also from that of audience members.

In this manner, I think that the reason why this piece could not be developed as a social movement beyond the stage also lies in the fact that audience, especially women was not really ready for doing that, as well as the fact that the production team did not focus on achieving that goal.

Q 7. It is possible to discover several differences between the Korean production of The Vagina Monologues and the USA production of the same piece. Representatively, in terms of scenic design, most of Korean productions tended to have more complicated scenic designs compared to the original production. Do you think it is possible to say that this difference was caused by the different
theatrical convention of two different countries?

A 7. Frankly, I am not sure if I can call this a theatrical ‘convention’ of Korean theatre scene, but I am pretty sure that there is a kind of clear tendency in the Korean theatre scene. As you have seen, in the 2004 production of *The Vagina Monologues*, I sometimes let Juhee Seo just read a monologue, not ‘perform’ the monologue. Do you think the audience would have accepted that as a play if I had directed all of the monologues in the same way? I don’t think so. They would have called it a kind of recitation rather than a performance. That was why I needed to have some type of theatrical props on the stage as well as variations. A Korean audience always wants to see something spectacular on the stage in terms of visualization. They want to see something they cannot do, but the performers can. Having a sophisticated scenic design sometimes can be one of the simplest ways to achieve this goal. And, I think that this is normal for every Korean production regardless of the size of the theatre. That may be why it is very easy for all of us to appreciate numerous productions, which are presented with spectacular scenic design in Korea.

Q 8. Compared to the original production, *The Vagina Monologues* directed by you had a fully developed scenic design. Can I accept this under the same context with what you just said?

A 8. Actually, I did not think that what my production team did in designing the set for the 2004 production was enough. I wanted to add something more to the stage.
However, I could not do that for basically two reasons.

First, the way this piece was written did not really match a fully designed set. As you know, this piece is a series of monologues. Every monologue has a different background setting time and place. It would have been very difficult if I tried to present every time and place, which works as a background for a monologue with the scenic design, not in a symbolic or a metaphoric way, but in a descriptive or a depictive way the scenic design. So, what I did was take advantage of lighting design and costume design. By having some changes in costume and lighting design, I could build a type of individual atmosphere from one monologue to another.

The second reason which prevented me from having more scenic design pieces and stage properties on the stage lies in a practical context. As you know, I was involved in the fifth production of The Vagina Monologues in Korea. Once I was involved, it was already well-known to the public thanks to the great successes of several previous productions. The company, which hired me as the director did not want me to make many changes. So, frankly, I did not have unlimited rights to direct this piece. If I had unlimited rights to direct this piece as I wanted, it would have been very different from what you have seen.

Q 9. It seems that there also was a difference between the Korean production of The Vagina Monologues and the USA production of the same piece in terms of how the audience reacted to this piece. I want to hear your opinion on this issue.
A 9. Having interactions with the audiences is truly important in every kind of stage performances, I think. The same goes for Korean theatre, of course. However, ‘presenting’ ‘displaying,’ and ‘performing’ are as crucial as building interactions with the audiences in Korean theatre. What I mean by this is that Korean audiences are relatively more passive than Western audiences. Sometimes, they just want to ‘appreciate’ what is happening on the stage without any active participation. However, in many cases of monodrama, the piece requires the performer to interact with the audience more directly, as compared to the pieces which have more than two performers. The case of The Vagina Monologues is not an exception. The performer continuously asks questions expecting to hear some answers from the audience. However, in my opinion, this was not very normal until quite recently. In this context, I am sometimes wondering whether a form of so-called monodrama is a really good fit for the Korean theatre scene or not.

Q 10. Can you tell me more specifically about the relationship between the stage and the audience which is observed in Korean theatre scene?

A 10. According to several historical sources dealing with the traditional performances of Korea, it appears that Korean audiences of those days were strongly involved in the performances. For example, in the case of Pansori, audiences took an active part in the performance. They not only appreciated what the performer did, but also encouraged and assisted the performer by bringing some adlib or
improvisational rhythm called ‘chuimsae’ into the piece. Since having an intimate interaction between the audience and the performer was extremely important in Pansori, those fragments added by audiences were considered as one of the top three important factors in the Pansori performance.

However, in the modern Korean theatre scene, it is really hard to see this kind of audience involvement. Especially since Western style theatre was imported, the attitudes of Korean audiences regarding stage performances have changed greatly. Since Westernized theatres started to be widespread, Korean audience started to tend to just ‘appreciate’ the performances.

I think that this can be explained in relationship with the modern history of Korea. In the early era of modern Korean society, understanding and having experienced Western culture and was considered a sign of one’s sophistication. The concept of ‘etiquette’ also started to be spread around that time. Being a quiet member of the audience was seen as one sign of etiquette. Appreciating the performance without making any noise during the performance, including the clapping sound, and observing the show without interfering with the performance were also known as parts of etiquette.

As we know, in recent days, there are lots of novel attempts to build a new relationship between audiences and performers, but in Korea, it was a little bit risky to direct some pieces expecting audiences’ intimate involvements into the piece, up to a point. For example, it was not unusual to observe ‘quiet’ audiences in front of the performer who was asking them a question. In this way, Korean
audiences are relatively passive compared to USA audiences. It might be my biased opinion, but I think that this may be one of the reasons which caused the differences between reactions of Korean audiences and the USA audiences.

Q 11. If there is another opportunity for you to direct this piece again, what do you want to try in directing this piece?

A 11. If there is another chance for me to direct this piece, I will think about what I can do in order to adapt this piece to the greatest extent. In addition to this, the matter of how I can meet the audience through this piece will be another great concern of mine. Personally, I want to cast a not so good-looking actor with no make-up. By doing that, I expect that I will be able to create more sincere, honest, and frank atmosphere for the audience.
Appendix D:

Interview with Roopina Oh, the assistant director of *The Vagina Monologues* (2006)
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Interview with Roopina Oh, the assistant director of *The Vagina Monologues* (2006)

When 8 Aug. 2008
Where Heywhadong, Seoul, South Korea
Interviewer Jirye Lee
Interviewee Roopina Oh, the assistant director of *The Vagina Monologues* (2006)

Q 1. What led you to be an assistant director of *The Vagina Monologues* in 2006?
A 1. I have seen this production performed by Juhee Seo before I got involved in the 2006 production of this piece. I found it very interesting, and thought that it was a very well written piece. So, when Jina Lee suggested that I be her assistant director, I could say yes without any hesitation.

Q 2. What was the most important theme or concept in directing this piece?
A 2. This piece was written based on Eve Ensler’s interviews with more than 200 women. Since this piece was based on true stories, it is very realistic. However, depending on when and where it is performed, the matter of reality can be seen totally differently. So what our production team focused on most reducing the gap between two different realities: realities created by Eve Ensler and the reality
which was supposed to be built by our production team. To be a little bit more specific, we focused on trying to arouse sympathy from female audience members in their twenties or thirties who were expected to be the major audience of this production, in a more effective and emotional way when this piece was performed on the stage. This was why we added some songs to the piece.

Q 3. You said that you have seen *The Vagina Monologues* performed by Juhee Seo before 2006. Can you tell me how you liked it?

A 3. The most impressive thing in that production was the talent of Juhee Seo as an actor. On the stage, she was amazing. During the performance, I found that the success of this piece totally depended on the ability of the actor. According to Jina Lee, what she focused on most when she was working with Juhee Seo was letting Seo present her ability as an actor as much as she could. Actually, many newspaper reviews of that production rated Seo’s talent very highly. However, I think that it was the power of the director. This is because it was Jina Lee who let Juhee Seo do a great job.

Q 4. You have seen *The Vagina Monologues* performed by Juhee Seo before 2006 and you have been involved in the same piece performed by Youngnam Jang in 2006. How are they common and how are they different?

Q 4. I do not think that it will be meaningful for me to make a comparison between the two actors in terms of their ability as actors. This is because, both of them did
a really great job on the stage in their own unique way, I think.

The thing that I want to talk about is, in the matter of creating or building an overall atmosphere of the play, each actor chose different strategy, and as a result, Seo’s and Jang’s performances had a totally different mood from each other. While Seo’s performance seemed to have a certain distance in it between the stage and the performer, Jang’s performance seemed more open to its audience. What I mean by this is that it seemed there were more possibilities for the audience to participate in the show in Jang’s performance, as compared to Seo’s performance. As one of the most significant reasons for this, I want to point out the fact that Seo has more experience as an actor than Jang as she is older. Whereas Jang could be seen as a sister, Seo might be seen as a mentor. When I recall the fact that the major audience of this production was females in their twenties and thirties, I think that it might have been easier for them to voluntarily participate in the show or in some events after the show because of the actor’s age. This was the biggest difference between the two productions from my personal point of view.

As a representative common feature which is observed between these two productions, I want to mention the fact that both of them started with a mood of shyness and concluded with that of courage. Even though there was a time interval between the two shows, there was no change in the fact that using the word ‘vagina’ in public was still a strict taboo in Korean society in 2006 as well as in 2001. So, it was natural for both of the performances to elicit an awkward
and somewhat shy mood. However, in both cases, the show was concluded in a really courageous mood with many audience members who looked very excited about being a part of this performance.

Q 5. I interviewed Sookryeol Ryu who translated this piece into Korean. I asked her what she disliked the most when she saw the second production of this piece directed by Jina Lee. She said that “I found the way it was directed was too asexual, and I did not like that.” She said that while the original piece written and performed by Eve Ensler is very sexually lively, animating, and full of fire, the production directed by Jina Lee seemed a little bit too serious, earnest, and grave. What do you think about this?

A 5. Not entirely, but partially I can agree with Ryu’s idea about the production. However, I think that it was a decision reflecting the consideration of the Korean society.

In the case of the 2006 production, it could be performed in a more open atmosphere. It was because *The Vagina Monologues* was already well-known to the public through several successful productions in the past by that point. However, in the case of the second production, the situation was slightly different. It took almost 15 minutes for Seo to speak out the word ‘vagina’ on the stage. Seo needed to offer background information about this play and about Eve Ensler for the audience, before she started to perform this piece. Seo started with a line such as “Hm.. I do not know how I can start this….”
However, in the case of Youngnam Jang, this kind of ‘warm-up’ was not needed. As I told you before, this piece was already well-known to the public, and the audience who came to the theatre to see this piece was quite ready for it. I think that this was possible because we tried to communicate with the public ‘gradually.’ I do not think that this kind of change could have happened if we directed this piece in a sexually direct way in order for this piece to be more alive from the very first time.

Q 6. It is true that Eve Ensler has a great reputation as a playwright and a poet, but it is equally true that she is also well known as a feminist activist. In many cases, she introduces herself to others as a feminist. Under this condition, how can we understand the fact that once there was a monologue deriding feminists in Korean production of this piece?

A 6. It is true that once there was a monologue deriding feminists in Korean production of this piece before the 2006 production. I thought that it must have been a kind of strategic decision on the part of the production team. What I mean by this is that first, we have to remember the fact that feminism is not usually welcome in Korean society, and second, that Eve Ensler and Juhee Seo or Youngnam Jang are not sharing the exact same ideas about feminism. Even though both Seo and Jang agreed with Eve Ensler, there still were several differences in the matter of attitudes toward this issue among these three performers.
For example, Juhee Seo said, “Even though I can agree with what she thinks about this issue, I cannot agree with how she deals with it.” In addition to this, Youngnam Jang also confessed that she was not entirely on Ensler’s side, by saying “I am not a feminist. I do not want to even pretend that I am. What I want to do is just to talk. I do not think that I have to claim something with this play.” Is any qualification needed to discuss this issue, such as being a feminist? I think that it is meaningful enough to start a conversation about this issue even though the performers for this show had a slightly different position than Eve Ensler’s. To conclude, I admit that there was a monologue which might have been construed as a mockery of feminists in the past Korean productions of *The Vagina Monologues*. However, that monologue was included strategically to counter anti-feminist opinions in Korea, which are distorted and misrepresented.

Q7. What was the most significant difficulty that you had to face during the rehearsal process as an assistant director?

A7. It was me who was in charge of training the actor, Youngnam Jang, for the 2006 production. To tell the truth, there was no single rehearsal which was easy, because what we did for every rehearsal was not just practicing the scenes, but also discussing the style and concept of the show. The biggest challenge that we had was adjusting this piece for the Korean audience, and targeting a specific audience.

The matter of choosing the audience between those who just want to be
entertained by this piece and those who want to take this issue more seriously remained a truly hard dilemma until the very last moment of the rehearsal process. Not only that, but we also could not be sure if we were supposed to present just a theatrically spectacular performance or if we were supposed to lead the audience to a more serious discussion beyond the piece itself.

Another difficulty that we had to face was the matter of adapting this piece in an appropriate way. In other words, we had to spend a long time to find a way to recreate this piece in a Korean way. For example, there is a monologue entitled, “The Flood.” The storyteller for this monologue is a grandmother. In our opinion, she would never tell her story about her vagina to others if she were Korean. In this way, not only finding proper words or terms but also creating a Korean atmosphere throughout the performance was indeed hard as far as adaptation was concerned.

Q 8. In the case of the USA, The Vagina Monologues was not only accepted as a theatrical piece, but also as a social movement, which succeeded in arousing many people’s sympathy. For example, there were several journal articles dealing with this piece from the feminist perspective, and V-day, a nonprofit organization for women, was established in a strong connection with the success of this piece. However, it was really hard to observe the same kind of reaction or involvement to this piece in Korea. I wonder if you think the Korean production of this piece delivered the original intention of Eve Ensler properly.
Jina Lee, who has directed this play several times since 2001, saw this work in England. She said that she was really impressed with this piece when she saw it in England. In particular, she was very surprised when she observed the enthusiastic reactions of the audience to the piece. Her experience of this script in England led her to stage this piece in Korea. However, she did not think that it could be possible to observe the same enthusiasm from the Korean audiences by simply translating this piece into Korean.

She focused on the fact that Western countries and Asian countries are based on quite different gender awareness traditions, and she was worried about this. She thought that if this piece were presented just as it was in other Western countries, some audiences may be offended by it, because the tone of this piece is very direct, aggressive, and straightforward. Thus, she was very careful in adjusting this piece to have a better fit with the Korean society.

Since Lee thought that Korean audiences were not as ready to deal with this issue in public, as audiences in Western countries were, she stepped back a little bit. However, I do not think that this means that our production team ignored the original intention of Eve Ensler. Rather, it was just having a somewhat different point of view in dealing with the matter of explaining Eve Ensler’s issues to the public in Korea in a Korean way. Our production team did not want to offend Korean audiences with too much radicalism. We did not want to break down all of the taboos about the female body through this piece. What we tried to do was just ‘start a conversation through this piece.’ Since the production reflected these
concerns, it might have appeared that it minimized the social meaning of Eve Ensler’s work, but I think that it was rather a strategic one step back for two steps forward in the future.

Q 9. *The Vagina Monologues* is well known as a play whose theme is the power of speaking out about what we could not speak out about before. However, even though its core theme is speaking out, the title or this play was not translated into Korean. Do you not think that this is ironic?

A 9. Since our production team had to consider the context of Korean society, we were careful in dealing with this issue. It is true that our team had our primary focus on making this piece more interesting, stylized, and popular, but it is also true that we kept the matter of how we can better deliver the message of the original creator of this piece, Eve Ensler, in our mind as well. What I mean by this is that even though Jina Lee’s production of this piece was not as radical or as progressive as Eve Ensler’s work on the stage, we could still observe some kind of ‘effect’ of this piece.

For example, in 2004, we prepared something like a talk session after the show. It was the time that we allotted for the audiences to share their own stories about vaginas. Many people shared their impressions about the performances. It seemed many audiences found the piece highly touching as well as shocking. There were so many people who confessed that they had never said the word ‘vagina’ out loud before they saw the show. We also heard several statements
from many audience members declaring they would love their body, boji in particular, more than before during the talk session. I think that all of these ‘reactions’ mean something in Korean society, even though the audience was not as engaged as the USA audiences.

As another example, in 2006, we prepared an event for the audience after the performances. It was a poetry workshop with the word ‘vagina.’ Actually, we did not expect that there would be so many participants in this event, but we were surprised, not only because there were so many people who wanted to take part in this event, but also because they were highly open-minded about this issue as compared to previous productions.

Actually, the reactions from the audiences were not the only part that was changed since the past in the history of The Vagina Monologues in Korea. The productions also developed with time, I think.

In the 2006 production, a monologue called ‘angry vagina’ was presented for the first time in Korea. Before this production this monologue was not presented on Korean stage, because the production team thought that this monologue could be too radical for the Korean audience. However, after observing several Korean productions until 2005, we decided to include this monologue in the 2006 production. Even though there were some audience members who left the house during the performance, overall this monologue was favorably received. In addition to this, a monologue written by an audience member was also included
in the 2006 production. I think that these kinds of changes reflect the changed attitude of Korean society regarding this issue.

Q 10. If there were some reviews, articles or audience’s reactions, which were impressive to you, tell me.

A 10. Regarding the newspaper articles or reviews, I do not remember if I found anything impressive or not. However, there were some audience members’ reactions, which I thought were truly impressive.

Once, a male high school teacher has brought his class to the show. They were all female teens. I observed that some of them were sleeping, some of them were texting with their cell phones, and some of them were doing something else during the performance. However, except these students, I found that many of them were really interested in this piece. Actually, I have thought that current teens are more interested in something stimulating and spectacular such as Video Games and Movies. However, they surprised me by appreciating the show very earnestly.

After the show, we offered a kind of a special talk session for them. During the session, one of the students said, “Through the performance, I found that I have never thought my body had a vagina. Even though I have learned about it in the biology class, I have never felt that it was ‘mine.’ From now on, I will try to remember it with care.” There was also a student who said that this piece
reminded her of her mother. I, as an assistant director of this piece, was really
touched by what she said. Of course, it is also true that there still were some
audience members who were offended by the use of the word ‘vagina.’ However,
I found that some kind of change was happening as compared to the past
production throughout the 2006 production.

Q 11. One of the things, which made the 2006 production a hot topic of conversation
was the fact that its cast member was changed from Juhee Seo to Youngnam Jang.
I wonder if there was any specific reason for your production team to cast her in
the 2006 production. In addition to this, I also would like you to tell me about
Youngnam Jang in more detail. What kind of an actor is she?

A 11. It was not easy to find an actor who could replace Juhee Seo. Among the many
actors who were mentioned, Youngnam Jang was the one who was recommended
by the greatest numbers of people. So, we tried to contact her, and we found that
she was interested in being involved in this production. At the time, she was
looking for a production that she could be involved in with all her heart. That
made us think that it would be great if we could have her as a performer for our
show. So, we cast her for our show.

The thing that I can tell you about her is that first, Youngnam Jang is a hard
worker, second, she is a truly passionate actor, and third, she is a professional
who really loves what she is doing. During the rehearsal process, many people
were surprised by her extraordinary passion. Since this piece is a monodrama, it
is true that she must have had a hard time in the beginning of the rehearsal process memorizing all the lines, but she overcame it easily by putting her best effort in it.

Q 12. How long have you worked with Jina Lee?
A 12. I met her first through the university that I was attending. She ran several classes at my school and I was one of her students. By being a student of hers, I found that she is not only a great director, but also a wonderful mentor. Especially, I was greatly impressed with her great instinct for discovering good pieces and her ways of analyzing them.

Once, she offered me a position of assistant director. Since I have respected her for a long time, I accepted her suggestion without hesitation. I think that it was 2003, when Jina Lee was directing Closer. I have worked with her as her assistant director ever since then. As she is such an open-minded person, she always listens to the opinions of all of the production team members including mine with consideration. Thanks to her thoughtful way of working, I think that I could learn a lot from her.

Q 13. I would like to know what you think of Jina Lee as a director.
A 13. Most of all, I want to say that she is a director who has a great talent for reading the trends of Korean theatre scene. As a director, she does not set her bounds either on traditional convention or on tendencies and trends, but always tries to
do something new and novel. In this manner, I think that she is a great director. I cannot remember exactly when it was, but, once I saw the result of a public opinion poll about the most influential Korean theatre director. In that survey, she was ranked first. I think that this result shows that there are many people who have high expectations of her.